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Christ as made known to the
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CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE
ANCIENT CHURCH.

CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE
ANCIENT CHURCH:

AN EXPOSITION

OF

THE REVELATION OF DIVINE GRACE,

AS UNFOLDED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

BY THE LATE
ROBERT GORDON, D.D., F.R.S.E.,
EDINBURGH.

VOL. II.

EDINBURGH:
JOHNSTONE AND HUNTER.

M.DCCC.LIV.

EDINBURGH :
PRINTED BY JOHNSTONE AND HUNTER,
104 HIGH STREET.

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CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

XLIII.

THE LAW OF THE LEPER.

LEVITICUS XIII. 45.

THE Book of Leviticus consists chiefly of that system of religious rites and ordinances which God was pleased to prescribe to the people of Israel, and which is commonly called the ceremonial law. The leading ordinance of that system was animal sacrifice, whereby it was intimated that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. This ordinance had been instituted by divine authority immediately after the fall; and from that period downward had no doubt spoken peace to the conscience of many a child of God. But at the period referred to in the passage before us, this ordinance was made the subject of so many regulations, and was presented in such a variety of forms, as to render it almost a new institution, exhibiting such views of the nature and consequences of Christ's atoning sacrifice as furnish even now the simplest illustration which is to be found in Scripture of the great doctrine of Atonement,—the substitution of a suffering victim in the room of sinners as the ground of their reconciliation, and the medium of their approach to God.

But besides the ordinance of sacrifice, God was pleased to prescribe to the people of Israel a great variety of rites and ceremonies, all of them designed and fitted not only to distinguish their religious worship from that of the nations around them, but also to remind themselves that they had been selected as God's peculiar people,—that their character as such was to be a character of purity and holiness,—and at the same time to show them that they were in themselves altogether unworthy and unfit, by reason of their impurity and vileness, to occupy so high and honourable a place; thereby shutting them up to the necessity of their relying on the Atonement as the only ground of their acceptance with God.

That such was the great design of the ceremonial observances to which I refer, must be obvious to every one who is at all familiar with the book before us. These ceremonies consisted mainly of washings and purifications calculated to produce external purity, and consequently intimating that the subjects of them stood in need of cleansing. They were continually reminded that the Lord God was in the midst of them, and that nothing impure or externally loathsome should be seen in all their borders. They were taught to regard some animals as clean, and others as unclean, and were strictly forbidden to employ any of the latter either in sacrifice or for food. Certain kinds of clothing also were prohibited as implying impurity, because they were composed, not of one simple substance, but of mixed materials; and they were in like manner forbidden to sow their vineyard with divers seeds, lest the fruit of their vineyard should be defiled. Many circumstances, indeed, which were not in their own nature productive of external pollution, were nevertheless declared to render a person unclean, so as to exclude him for a season from the congregation of God's people, and the religious services of the place in which God condescended to dwell.

I cannot and I need not attempt to enumerate the various causes of uncleanness whereby the people of Israel were thus declared to be unfit for mingling with their brethren, or engaging in the holy services of the sanctuary. They were such, and so numerous, that any individual might at any moment contract ceremonial uncleanness, from which he could not be purified, but

by the strict observance of a most rigorous ritual. As a system, therefore, of mere external ordinances, the ceremonial law must have been a source of such constant anxiety, and have given rise to such a laborious servitude, as to be a very heavy yoke of bondage,—a yoke of which we find the apostles themselves declaring that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear it.

But it were a very limited and imperfect view of the subject to suppose, that in thus characterising the Mosaic dispensation, the apostles meant nothing more than that it was outwardly a very burdensome ritual, calling for great watchfulness, and occasioning much inconvenience, by the perpetual interruptions in their ordinary pursuits and employments to which it subjected them. No doubt it was in these respects a very laborious service, and there were probably many among the people of Israel at all times,—and, at some periods of their history, perhaps a great majority of them, who regarded it only in this light,—who complied with its injunctions because they were afraid of the consequences of neglecting them, but who would gladly have dispensed with such compliance if they had thought that they could do so with safety. For is there not reason to fear that such is the feeling of many professing Christians regarding the simple service of the Gospel,—that it is with them a mere bodily service,—and that, though neither laborious nor burdensome, they are disposed to say of it, “Behold, what a weariness is it!”

But the weight of the yoke which the ceremonial law imposed did not consist only, or even mainly, in the variety and burdensome nature of mere outward observances, multiplied and laborious as these were. It was in an especial manner a heavy yoke, inasmuch as it was designed and fitted to keep them perpetually alive to a sense of God’s presence, at the same time that it did most emphatically remind them of his purity and of their own pollution. The devout believer could not fail, as often as he incurred ceremonial uncleanness, to regard it as an intimation that, in consequence of his moral defilement, he was unfit and unworthy to hold communion with God; and being liable every day, nay, every hour, to be thus rendered unclean, there was constantly maintained a sense of sin upon his conscience, whereby he must have been burdened and oppressed. No doubt there was relief for him, not only in the sacrifices which

he was permitted to offer, but in the very washings and purifications which the ceremonial law prescribed ; because it was very plainly intimated thereby that there was one day to be a fountain opened to the house of Israel for sin and for uncleanness. But the relief was only temporary. He was liable the next hour to contract uncleanness again, and again to feel that he was shut out from fellowship with God, until he had applied anew to the appointed method of cleansing. There was thus a continual remembrance of sin generated by the ceremonial law, whereby the conscience was burdened, and which to true believers was an unspeakably heavier load than all the weight of mere outward observances, however complicated or laborious,—while the ordinances which it prescribed were but types of the great Atonement by which alone the guilt of sin is removed, and emblems of that operation of the Holy Spirit whereby the pollution of sin is washed away ; and on this ground, therefore, as well as because of its burdensome rites, it was declared by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to have been a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.

Of the many causes of ceremonial uncleanness whereby the people of Israel were thus continually reminded of their guilt and moral defilement, one of the most remarkable in itself, and the most instructive from the law prescribed for the treatment of it, was the plague of leprosy. How far it was a natural disease, and to what extent it prevailed as such, either among the people of Israel or among other nations, it is not necessary to inquire. God saw meet to employ it as a most significant symbol of the defilement of sin, and an expression of his holy displeasure against it. Of the latter, we have very striking instances in the case of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, who was struck with leprosy because she had sinned in speaking against Moses ; in the case of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, who, because of his deceit, had the leprosy of Naaman entailed upon himself and upon his seed for ever ; and in that of Uzziah, one of the kings of Judah, who, because he usurped the office of the priesthood, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense, was smitten with leprosy at the instant by the immediate hand of God, and was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house ; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.

But it is as a figure or representation of the guilt and pollution of sin that leprosy is here brought under our notice, and the importance of the instruction which it is intended to convey is very plainly intimated by the lengthened and minute detail of the manner in which it was to be distinguished from other affections which resembled it, the treatment of the case when it was discovered to exist, and the rites to be observed when the infected person was cleansed. And none, I believe, who have experimentally known what an evil and bitter thing sin is, can seriously peruse the chapters before us, without recognising in the law of leprosy a very intelligible representation of the nature of sin itself, as well as of the feelings which a deep conviction of the guilt and defilement of sin never fails to awaken. There is scarcely any one of the rules or regulations prescribed by the law of leprosy which might not be referred to in illustration of this remark. But I would refer generally to what is represented of the insidious nature of the plague or malady here described.

It was such that the infected individual himself was, for a time at least, altogether unconscious of his uncleanness, and would not have discovered it. The priest, under the guidance of divine direction, was alone qualified and authorised to examine and determine the existence of the plague, and to pronounce the infected person unclean. And how forcibly will this remind many humble and penitent readers of their original insensibility to their condition as sinners, as well as of the means whereby they were awakened to a sense of that condition ! Though infected with a malady, which, if not counteracted and ultimately healed, must have proved eternally ruinous to them, by excluding them for ever from the favour and fellowship of God, they had in reality no apprehension of danger, and no sense of misery, beyond the occasional pain and uneasiness which all must more or less experience in a world where sin is so fruitful in suffering. In a general way they might acknowledge perhaps that they were sinners, and in terms equally vague they might acknowledge that all the pain and disappointment which they experienced were the consequences of sin. But they had no deep and heartfelt conviction of being so laden with guilt as to have incurred and to be still lying under the condemnation of God,

—a sentence of banishment from the divine presence; and far less were they conscious of there being any thing in their nature so vile as to render them loathsome in the sight of God, and as unfit as they were unworthy to enjoy fellowship with what is pure and holy. They were not vile in their own sight,—sin itself had never been a source of unhappiness to them, whatever its consequences might have been,—they could not understand what was meant by the deformity of sin as set forth in the Bible itself, or more fully expounded in what they were accustomed to hear in the ordinary preaching of the Gospel, unless in the case of some gross and flagrant immoralities, to which, perhaps, they were not naturally addicted, or from which they were by education or circumstances restrained,—in fact, they would have been contented to remain for ever as they were, to have had an eternity of such an existence as they had already enjoyed, provided that nothing more severe in the way of suffering should ever occur to them than what they had already experienced.

True, they knew nothing of what it is to hold communion with God,—to have fellowship with him in prayer,—to feel that they were holding converse with him,—and to realise his presence as hearing their supplications, and conveying to them by his Spirit the gracious assurance that their supplications should not be overlooked or forgotten,—that their requests should be answered in the way and at the time that he saw best for his own glory and for their good. Of all this they knew nothing, nor did they care about knowing it. To be cut off from fellowship with God was in their estimation no calamity. If they formally prayed, or rather, I should say, if they uttered a form of prayer, it was but a form,—an observance which somehow they thought it better and safer to maintain than to neglect. But as to receiving an answer to their prayer when they professedly asked for spiritual blessings,—for pardon and acceptance through the blood of Christ, and for the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit,—it never once entered into their mind either to expect or to wish for such a thing. They never dreamt of any thing like a divine communication imparting to them peace and joy in believing,—comforting them with a sense of God's forgiving mercy,—and awakening in their souls a feeling of child-like confidence

toward God as their gracious and forgiving Father,—their almighty Friend,—their very present help in the time of trouble. They might have been accustomed, perhaps, to hear the privileges of God's people set forth in some such language as this ; and being familiar with the sound of it, they might suppose that they understood its import as far and as fully as it was necessary to understand it. But if they had been solemnly and seriously asked whether they had ever enjoyed or really expected to enjoy such privileges, they would have been sorely perplexed for a reply, inasmuch as, never having felt the misery of being cut off from communion with God, they could have no earnest or longing desire for being restored to that communion.

Meanwhile, the leprosy of sin was continuing to extend its influence,—not, perhaps, so far as to hurry them into open and scandalous sins ; for against these there might be a thousand worldly motives strong enough to make them successfully contend. But their state was essentially an ungodly one,—they were unconscious of the loathsome disease which had cut them off from fellowship with God, and had no desire, therefore, to be healed,—they had never felt the load of guilt which exposed them to punishment, far less did they feel the misery of being unholy,—they were utterly insensible to the evil and malignity of sin, except in so far as it appeared in some of its more aggravated forms, in crimes which they had no temptation or no opportunity to perpetrate,—in the emphatic language of the apostle, they were “dead in trespasses and sins.”

Such, I fear, is the condition of vast multitudes who, in their own estimation, and in the judgment of their fellow-men, are in a spiritually healthful condition. They may be very decent in their general character,—very decorous in their deportment,—very regular in their attendance on public ordinances,—and very free from all scandalous violations of the letter of the divine law. Though they cannot pretend to be absolutely free from sin, and though none would admit their pretensions if they ventured to allege that they were so ; yet they may call their sins by the gentle name of shortcomings and failings, and may find credit with the world for being as pure and as free from sin as it is reasonable to expect that men should be. But all the while these failings and shortcomings are the sure symptoms of the debasing and

deadly leprosy with which their whole nature is infected,—the disease which the divine Physician alone can disclose as well as heal.

And so will multitudes of true believers be ready to acknowledge that it was with them. They will confess that once they were quite contented with their condition,—acknowledging, indeed, that they were not free from faults, as every man has his weaknesses, — but ready to resent it as a grievous calumny, had it been alleged of them, that if they lived and died in the state in which they then were, they must be for ever undone. And they will confess, too, that if left to themselves they would never have discovered the deadly malady under which they were pining away,—that they would have regarded the symptoms of their spiritual leprosy, which was working their eternal ruin, as nothing more than those imperfections which, it is universally acknowledged, cleave to every man in this imperfect state,—and that but for a gracious interposition of the great Physician and High Priest, they would have contentedly lived and died without knowing that they were spiritually diseased.

But He did graciously interpose. By his Word, carried with power to the conscience by his Spirit, he convinced them that they were perishing. As the priest did with the leper of old, he pronounced authoritatively, and in a way which they could not deny or dispute, that they were unclean, and therefore excluded from all fellowship with God,—and he made them feel, in spite of all the resistance which they made to the unwelcome truth, that unless their spiritual leprosy were cleansed they must perish for ever.

The first effect of this conviction was to fill them with fear and trembling. Conscience being once awakened, and, at the same time, enlightened by the Word of God, set before them an array of sins which they had treated lightly, and had soon forgotten, but which now appeared to them of such magnitude in themselves, and accompanied with such aggravations as well-nigh overwhelmed them in despondency; and the secret cry of their soul was, “What shall I do to be saved?” They did not, perhaps, see at first such a deformity in sin as to make it the object of their abhorrence simply on the ground of its own malignity and vileness. But they saw enough of its opposition

to the divine law, and they felt enough of its burden, as carrying with it the wrath and curse of God, to convince them that unless it were removed it must sink them into perdition. Though they did not see the loathsomeness of their spiritual leprosy, considered simply in itself, and apart from its consequences, yet they felt that they were carrying about with them a mortal malady,—a disease which, if not healed, must terminate in eternal death.

Their first and great concern, therefore, was to have this disease arrested,—to know whether there was any remedy for that disease, any fountain of efficacy sufficient to wash away their guilt. And when, by the teaching of the same Spirit, whose divine energy had awakened their slumbering conscience, they were led to the Saviour, they then discovered, for the first time, the preciousness of the Scripture truth, “The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.” And when they read in the chapters before us of the cleansing of the leper,—of the blood mingled with running water wherewith he was to be sprinkled, and afterwards pronounced clean,—they will see in that ordinance an affecting type of Him from whose pierced side there came forth blood and water; and when they reflect on the feelings which must have been awakened in the mind of the leper, when, after a season of separation from his brethren and from the sanctuary of the Lord, the priest pronounced him clean, it cannot fail to awaken a lively recollection of their own experience, when, by a believing application to Christ, they first knew practically the healing virtue of his blood in pacifying the conscience when pierced with a sense of unforgiven guilt.

But though, at this period of their spiritual history, believers have reached a resting-place from the disquietude and misgivings of a guilty mind, still it is but the commencement of that great process by which they are to be delivered from the deadly disease which naturally cleaves to them, and made meet for the enjoyment of intimate and uninterrupted fellowship with God. Though the guilt of sin is that which first lays hold of the conscience of awakened sinners,—and though their first and most anxious inquiry is, how their guilt may be forgiven,—still they have much to discover of the evil and deformity of sin itself, apart from the punishment which it deserves; and from the

moment that they are really convinced of their guiltiness, they will begin also to perceive their vileness and pollution. When, indeed, their eyes have once been opened to the spirituality of the divine law, every new perusal of that law will disclose to them more of the sinfulness of their past life, as well as of the impurity which still cleaves to them. The Word of God, as often as they carefully study it, will be to them what the ceremonial law was to the humble and devout among the people of Israel. It will continually be discovering to them the corruption of their heart and the sinfulness of their life; and while they see by the light of that Word all the ungodliness which characterised them in their unregenerate state, and while they experience its sharp and searching power dragging to light the secret pollution which still cleaves to them, they will perceive in the conduct and language of the leper, as set forth in the passage before us, a fit representation of the humility and self-abasement which it becomes them to cherish and to express before God.

The leper was commanded to place himself in the most humiliating circumstances, and to give warning to all who approached him to beware of touching him, lest they also should contract uncleanness. And how forcibly will this remind believers of what they once were, if they can recollect the time when they were yet without God and without hope in the world! Though they might, perhaps, be prevented by the restraints of God's providence from running into great excesses, or from becoming openly irreligious and profane; yet they will confess that they carried about with them an unholy influence,—that, so far as this influence operated on others, it tended to encourage rather than to check ungodliness,—and that on many occasions they must have been instrumental in spiritually injuring their fellow-men, if not by directly drawing them into sin, at least by rendering them more insensible to their guilt and danger, and thereby strengthening them in their alienation from God. Believers who can look back on such a state can never fail to remember it with deep humility; nor will it ever cease to be with them a very bitter reflection, that their character and example may have tended to render multitudes still more careless and unconcerned about their eternal interests, on whom they have no opportunity of now exercising a salutary influence. But this consideration

will render them the more anxious to exercise such an influence on as many as are within their reach,—the recollection of that period of their life which was worse than wasted, being not only withheld from the service of God, but spent in the service of sin, will stir them up to greater activity and diligence in redeeming the time that remains,—and it will be their great concern to arrest and counteract, so far as they have means, or can be instrumental in doing so, that spiritual leprosy which they once did so much to propagate and spread.

But it is not merely on reviewing their unregenerate state that believers see the malignity of the spiritual disease, with which, in common with every child of Adam, their nature is infected. Though, in their case, the progress of this disease towards its natural termination, namely, eternal death, has been arrested by the application of the only sovereign remedy, the blood that cleanseth from all sin, still its polluting taint, as the bitter experience of every day teaches them, has not been entirely removed. They are conscious of its impurity in the holiest of their motives and in the best of their services,—and never more so than when they are most anxious to be freed from its influence, and when the work of their purification by the power of the Holy Spirit is making the most rapid progress. It is when they are most feelingly alive to the deformity of sin, and are praying most fervently, and striving most earnestly against it, that their spiritual condition is most healthy. But it is at such times also that they will be most ready to adopt the language of the leper, and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.”

XLIV.

THE SCAPE - GOAT.

LEVITICUS XVI. 21, 22.

THE ordinance described in this chapter is, in many respects, the most solemn and important of all the religious rites prescribed to the Old Testament Church. A devout Israelite could not witness the solemnities of the great day of expiation or atonement, and meditate on what was transacted within the veil, when the high priest went into the holy of holies, without feeling as if the atonement then made was the great end for which the tabernacle had been constructed, and all its costly service appointed. No doubt, other and very important ends were to be served by that magnificent structure. When the Lord said unto Moses, "Let the children of Israel make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," he gave such a proof of his condescension as could not fail to awaken in every humble and devout mind feelings of profound admiration; and though the tabernacle had never been used in any other way or for any other purpose than that of being a dwelling-place for the symbol of the divine presence, it would have been at once a manifestation of the glorious majesty of God, fitted to awe the people of Israel into reverence and godly fear, and an intimation that his thoughts towards them were thoughts of peace and not of evil. But it was in the solemnities of the great day of atonement that the penitent and devout must have seen the chief purpose, so far as they were concerned, of that sanctuary which

had been planned by divine skill, and erected under the immediate guidance of divine teaching ; for it was then they learned, what it did most nearly concern them to know, not only that God had taken up his abode in the midst of them, but that there was a way of access into his immediate presence, whereby, in the person of the high priest as their representative, they might draw near and find acceptance with Him. And in the record of these solemnities we still see the same precious truth very clearly unfolded, even now that the way into the holiest of all has been made manifest ; for I know not that there is in Scripture any one passage that does more fully and strikingly set forth the nature, design, and consequences of Christ's atoning sacrifice, than the chapter from which the verses under consideration are taken.

It is true, the tabernacle and its service, though very magnificent and imposing, were only types or shadows of the great reality which is to be found in Christ and his finished work. But though they were only types, they contained a great deal more than merely such an outward representation of what they were designed to prefigure as to enable any one to recognise the Antitype when in the fulness of time it was revealed. There was, in the ordinance to which the passage before us more immediately refers, a distinct announcement of the great principle on which alone God can hold any fellowship with sinful and guilty creatures,—namely, the vindication of the honour and authority of his violated law, by the execution of the sentence of death incurred by transgression. With this there was also announced another principle, which no created intelligence could have ventured to suppose admissible in the divine government, unless God himself had declared that it was,—namely, that this sentence of death, as the penalty denounced by the law for sin, might be inflicted on another than the transgressors, so as to be available for their acquittal from guilt and their escape from punishment. Both these principles,—first, that the wages of sin is death, which must without fail be inflicted,—and second, that another may be put in the room of those who really deserve to die,—both of these principles were, no doubt, involved in the simple institution of animal sacrifice, even from the beginning. But they were announced and illustrated in the ordinance here described

with a clearness previously unknown, and a fulness that left nothing subsequently to be added. So distinctly indeed, and so emphatically, is the doctrine of vicarious suffering,—that is, the substitution of a victim in the room of sinners doomed to die,—so distinctly, I say, is this doctrine asserted and exemplified in the ordinance here referred to, that were I called to deal with the uninformed, who needed instruction on this vital and most momentous truth, or with the cavilling, who dispute whether the imputation of sin to the suffering victim be taught in Scripture, I know not any passage of Holy Writ to which I would sooner direct their attention than the 16th chapter of Leviticus.

But while the passage before us is especially fitted to instruct the ignorant and convict the gainsaying, in regard to the most momentous of all truths, it must ever be full of interest even to believers,—to those who have no ground of hope but in the doctrine of Christ's substitution in their room, and no consolation but in the habitual remembrance of that doctrine. As the believing Israelites of old saw, in the solemnities of the great day of atonement, the chief purpose of all the skill and cost which had been expended in the structure of the tabernacle, so believers will see in the death of Christ the great end of all God's previous dealings with men,—the fulfilment of all that he had foretold and prefigured,—the accomplishment of a plan which for four thousand years he had been gradually unfolding.

When Christ, indeed, did appear,—when the Eternal Word was made flesh, and dwelt or pitched his tabernacle among men,—that true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man—there was nothing in that event to attract the notice or to awaken the admiration of the world at large. He appeared in all the helplessness of infancy, and in a state of humble obscurity, rendered still more obscure by the very crowd which thronged his birth-place, and which consigned him to a stable as his first earthly place of abode. In the emphatic language of the prophet, he had no form nor comeliness; and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him. But it was, nevertheless, the most marvellous of all the events which ever did and ever can take place in the universe of God,—an event on which angels looked with amazement, and which they announced in strains of adoration and praise, as glory to God in

the highest, peace on earth, and good-will to men. And though this heavenly tabernacle of the Lord's pitching,—even our nature united with the divine, exhibiting God manifest in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth,—was, in regard to the world at large, like the tabernacle of old which Moses erected in the wilderness, where none beheld its glory and its beauty but Israel alone; yet there were true Israelites to whom spiritual discernment was given to perceive the glory of Christ,—“the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And in every subsequent age there have been, as there will continue to be, those who see in the incarnation, sufferings, and death of Christ, the accomplishment of a scheme to which all the other dispensations of God were designed to be subservient,—a scheme in which every renewed soul will find a subject of growing admiration and delightful study,—and by which there has been made known, even to principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God.

But it is not merely from a general view of the subject before us, that believers are reminded of that great undertaking, for the accomplishment of which the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among men. Every thing in the service of the day of expiation is full of instruction, not only as exhibiting a very intelligible though shadowy representation of Christ and his priestly office, but as unfolding those views of the character and perfections of God, and of the principles of his procedure towards men as guilty and polluted creatures, which it is of the last importance that we clearly apprehend and habitually contemplate. To be told that God is holy,—that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,—that he can hold no fellowship with what is unholy,—and that into his presence nothing that is unclean can enter, is assuredly a very solemn truth; and the bare statement of it may well awaken in the conscience of every sinful man feelings of anxiety and fear, which nothing can pacify but the discovery of a way whereby the guilty may approach God with acceptance. But this truth is brought still more vividly and impressively before us in the transactions here recorded,—transactions which no devout reader, I think, can seriously meditate upon without feeling somewhat of the holy reverence and awe which we cannot doubt filled the mind of every devout spectator.

In the solemn preparation which the high priest was required to make before entering into the holy of holies, and in the warning given to him of what the consequences would be if he ventured to approach without such preparation, the holiness of God is presented to us in such a way as to impress our very senses, and thereby to remove that vagueness which does too frequently attach to our ideas even of the most momentous truths. A short time before the institution of the ordinance here described, the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not; and there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. To this judgment express reference is made in the chapter before us, and while Aaron was forbidden to mourn for his sons, a solemn injunction was laid upon him to beware of coming within the veil at another time or in another manner than was expressly appointed: "The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." He was, moreover, to lay aside those vestments of rich and costly workmanship, which the Lord had commanded to be made "for glory and for beauty," and to be clothed in simple but holy garments of white linen; and thus attired, he was to offer a bullock for a sin-offering, to make an atonement for himself and for his house, before he could appear with acceptance in the most holy place on behalf of the congregation of Israel.

In all this there was a very palpable and impressive demonstration of the holiness of God, and of the polluting influence of sin, fitted to overawe the people of Israel with a sense of their unfitness for having to do with a God of such purity; and fitted still to deepen our convictions of the same truth, as well as to direct our thoughts to Him of whom these solemn transactions were after all but faint intimations. And there is much in these transactions so to remind us of Christ. As the High Priest of his Church, Christ's great undertaking was to appear in the presence of God on their behalf, and for their acceptance. But how solemn, how awful the preparation necessary for his entering into the most holy place, even the sanctuary above, so

that his appearing there might be available for their reconciliation with God, and their final admission into his presence ! Though heaven in all its glory was his rightful abode, where he had dwelt from eternity in the bosom of the Father, yet, if he was to accomplish his work of divine compassion and love, it behoved him to leave that abode of glory and blessedness, and for a season to dwell with men on the earth. As Aaron stripped himself of his robes, the vestment of gold which had been "made for glory and for beauty," so the great Antitype of Aaron was required to lay aside for a season the manifestation of his essential glory, the object of adoration to angels, that he might be despised and rejected of men. He had, indeed, no sin to be atoned for, and no impurity to be washed away, in order to prepare him for his work as High Priest, making atonement for his people. But he required to be treated as a sinner; and though in his own nature immaculate and righteous,—holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,—he was made under the law, and in that capacity was required to fulfil all righteousness. Though as God he possessed every excellence and perfection, and though the human nature which he assumed was a holy thing, yet the essential righteousness of his nature, though in itself the object of the Father's ineffable complacency, would not have availed for the acceptance of his people as righteous. To accomplish this, it behoved him to work out a righteousness on their behalf. It was not enough that he laid aside for a season the glories of the divine nature, and humbled himself to be an inhabitant of this sinful world. If he was to appear in heaven as the High Priest of his people, so as to procure their acceptance with God, and a blessing for them from the Holy One of Israel, it must be in holy garments of white linen,—even the unspotted righteousness of a perfect obedience,—obedience unto the death. Heaven, as I have already observed, was his own,—the abode of which he was the rightful proprietor,—and in which he was the object of worship to its blessed inhabitants. But he could re-enter that abode as the High Priest of his people only in virtue of his having satisfied the divine law by yielding the perfect obedience which it requires, and by enduring the penalty which it awards to transgressors; and accordingly it is testified of him by the apostle, as it was foretold of him in the passage before us, that "by his

his own blood he has entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us,"—even "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

Every devout reader will be able without difficulty to pursue to a greater length the subject of these remarks, and to discover, in the ordinance which we are now considering, other illustrations of the great truth, that God, as the Lawgiver and Judge, can deal with men only through a Mediator, and on the ground of a perfect righteousness. But besides the announcement and illustration of this great truth, the passage before us,—and especially the twenty-first and twenty-second verses,—presents a very clear and striking view of the manner in which Christ has become the Mediator between God and sinners, and has wrought out a righteousness sufficient, not only to satisfy the divine law, but to magnify and make it honourable,—and, therefore, a righteousness available for their justification. Aaron, we are told, was commanded to "take of the congregation of the children of Israel, two kids of the goats for a sin-offering." The two, it will be observed, constituted but one sacrifice or offering; and it is obvious from what is afterwards enjoined regarding the treatment and disposal of them, that two were required to be employed, because one would not have been sufficient to afford such a full explanation of the nature, efficacy, and effects of Christ's atoning sacrifice, as it was God's gracious purpose to give, for the instruction of his Church, both of that and of all subsequent times.

The two goats thus taken of the children of Israel for their sin-offering were presented before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, that he himself might determine by lot which was to be offered in sacrifice and which was to escape; though it was not to escape till it had again been presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement with him,—the other being offered as a sin-offering. And then followed the very solemn and expressive rite described in the passage under consideration. When Aaron had carried the blood of the slain goat within the veil, and sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, which was covered or concealed by a cloud of smoke rising from the sweet incense burning upon a censer of coals taken from the altar before the Lord, he brought

the live goat, and did with him as the passage before us describes. Aaron laid both his hands upon the head of the live goat, confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,—putting them upon the head of the goat,—and sent him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness; and the goat bare upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he let go the goat into the wilderness.

It is impossible to conceive how the doctrine of substitution,—the imputation of the guilt of sinners to the victim which was to die in their room,—could be more explicitly declared than it was in the solemnity here described. It was not a mere general statement that an atonement was made by shedding the blood of the animal slain in sacrifice. Such a statement would, no doubt, be a very explicit declaration, that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission, and also that by such a shedding of blood the guilty may be acquitted; and though nothing more had been said or done to explain the nature and design of animal sacrifice, I doubt not that many a humble and broken-hearted penitent would have found in that declaration a healing balm for their wounded conscience. But men, in their perverse ingenuity, have laboured to convince themselves, and to show to others, that sin is not the very dangerous and detestable thing which the Bible represents it, and have endeavoured to explain away the necessity of such an atonement as implies that the guilt of sinners has really been so transferred to or charged against Christ as their substitute, as to mean that he suffered the penalty which their sins had incurred. If, then, it had been the purpose of God to furnish a refutation of this deadly error,—an error which calumniates alike the justice and the mercy of God,—in what way could such a refutation be given in a more plain and incontrovertible manner than in the very solemn and significant ordinance here described? It is not a mere verbal statement, which men may contrive to misunderstand or explain away. It is a series of rites or outward actings, the import of which it is impossible to mistake, inasmuch as they admit of only one interpretation. While the sacrifice of one of the goats intimated, as animal sacrifice from the beginning did, that they for whom or on whose account it

was offered had forfeited their life to God as the offended Law-giver, and therefore deserved to die, the disposal of the other goat, which was equally a part of the sin-offering or atonement, as is expressly declared, did, in a very plain and emphatic manner, assure them that their sins were transferred to the victim which they offered, and would be remembered against them no more. The high priest laid both his hands on the head of the goat, acting as the representative of the whole congregation, who could not themselves approach the victim or lay their hand upon it, as was required in the case of an individual offering a sacrifice for himself personally.

This act itself was abundantly intelligible, as implying that the parties so doing were warranted to believe that they did thereby lay their sins on the head of the victim, which was at the same time expressly declared to be presented or offered to make an atonement with God. But the rite did not end here. While the high priest's hands were thus upon the head of the victim, he confessed over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat,—language which, in connection with the rite, is susceptible of only one interpretation, namely, that of a vicarious sacrifice, or, in other words, the substitution of a victim in the room of sinners, through which their guilt, and consequently the penalty which they had incurred, was removed from them. But as if to prevent the possibility of misapprehending the import of this statement, the high priest, after thus laying the sins of the congregation on the head of the goat, sent the goat away by the hand of a fit person into the wilderness; and it is added, that “the goat did bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited.” And, finally, to show that the goat was held to be loaded with the sins of the people, and thereby defiled, so that whosoever did afterwards touch it was to be unclean, it was expressly commanded that the man who led it into the wilderness, and there let it go for the scape-goat, should “wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp.”

Such was the leading rite in the service of the great day of expiation or atonement in the Old Testament Church,—a rite as intelligible and significant as it was gracious. And can we

doubt that the humble and penitent,—those who really were afflicting their souls because of sin,—who were deeply impressed with the majesty and holiness of God, and did at the same time believe, with the simplicity of children, that God really meant what he said,—can we doubt that such persons, at the close of the solemnity, returned to their dwellings joyful and glad of heart, with consciences unburdened of a sense of guilt, and with hearts enlarged with the assurance of God's forgiving mercy? It is true, the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin, and the imperfection of the atonement thereby made rendered the repetition of it necessary. But whatever might be the extent of their knowledge respecting the real atonement, of which the solemnities which they witnessed were but types, they could not doubt that there was a ground on which God could forgive the guilty,—that he did so on the principle of transferring their guilt to another who was to suffer in their room,—and that the sin-offering of the day of expiation was the medium through which he conveyed to them the benefit of this transference. The truly penitent and devout among them must have felt, that it would have been impious and insulting to the God of truth to doubt this after witnessing the solemn service of the day of atonement. Even with their very limited knowledge, therefore, of the great Atonement, which was to be offered in the person of Him who, as the seed of the woman, was to bruise the head of the serpent,—even with the comparatively dim views which they had of the person, and character, and work of the promised Seed, believers of Old Testament times might experience to a great extent a comforting assurance of God's favour and forgiveness; and for this assurance they must have been not a little indebted to the holy ordinance which we have now been considering.

But the benefit of the ordinance wherein this precious truth was so plainly announced and so clearly explained was not confined to the Old Testament Church. It still stands on record, affording the simplest and the most intelligible illustration that can be conceived, both of the substitution of Christ in the room of his people, and of the perfection and all-sufficiency of the atonement which he offered. And, accordingly, we find obvious allusions to that ordinance in the writings both of the prophets

and of the apostles, when they would set forth the nature and consequences of Christ's atonement. "All we like sheep," says Isaiah, "have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He did "his own self," says the apostle Peter, "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is declared that "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

The holy solemnity, then, which is described in the passage before us, is as full of encouragement to the humble and penitent now, as it was to Israel of old; inasmuch as it conveys still, what it did then, an assurance of the all-sufficiency of Christ,—the infinite worth of his atoning sacrifice,—the efficacy of his blood in cleansing from all sin. And its application to individuals is still the same as ever. Though the high priest confessed over the scape-goat all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, it was to believers only,—to those who by faith made the act their own, and were truly penitent,—that the atonement was available for their acceptance with God, and for their final salvation. And so it is still. It is by faith in Christ, as freely set forth in the Gospel to every sinner, that we reap the benefit and experience the relief of having our sins laid upon him. It is by faith that we do, as it were, put our hands on the head of the victim,—the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. This divine victim,—this Lamb of God's own providing,—is presented to all, and all are invited, in penitence and faith, to confess over him all their iniquities, and all their transgressions in all their sins, with the gracious assurance to all who do so, that the burden which is too heavy for them to bear will be removed, and that as he has already atoned for their guilt, so he will deliver their conscience from its depressing weight.

And to those who have experienced this relief, how deeply interesting should be the subject brought before them in the passage under consideration, as fitted to awaken a very lively apprehension of the reality of Christ's substitution in their room,—of the transference of their sins, the imputation of their guilt to him,—of his having borne these sins, and expiated that guilt

by the actual endurance of the penalty due to them,—and of the consequent removal of that penalty from them, their sins being no longer remembered against them. They know something of the terrors of the Lord. The very apprehension of being one day overtaken by divine wrath, and visited with the punishment which their iniquities deserved, was an overwhelming burden upon their spirits, under which they were ready to sink. But what they only conceived of, or felt by anticipation, Christ actually suffered, and suffered for them. He bare their sins in his own body on the tree,—the Lord laid upon him all their iniquities. He was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities, upon him the chastisement of their peace was laid, and by his stripes they have been healed. They must not be content with contemplating Christ's death as an atonement for sin generally. It was an atonement for their sins. All their iniquities, and all their transgressions in all their sins, were put upon his head,—and therefore it is that his righteousness has been put upon or imputed to them individually. It is only in thus viewing the imputation of their personal sins to Christ, and of his righteousness to them, that they will have right conceptions either of the malignity of sin as the procuring cause of the Saviour's agony and death, or of the amazing depth of that love which prompted him to undertake the mighty work of their redemption, and to be made sin for them, though he knew no sin, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him,

XLV.

BLOOD FORBIDDEN.

LEVITICUS XVII. 10-12.

THIS is not the first occasion on which we find the eating of blood forbidden in Scripture. A similar prohibition was laid upon Noah, when permission was first granted to use animals for food : "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." And in the preceding chapters of this book, we find the same command twice enjoined upon the people of Israel. But it is in the passage before us that the reason of the prohibition is expressly and fully stated : "For the life of the flesh is in the blood : and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls : for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood." Blood, then, was forbidden to be eaten because it was a holy thing,—a thing devoted to God,—and that by which reconciliation was made between the sinner and God, even an atonement for the soul that deserved to die. And so it was from the beginning ; for it was by shedding blood that Abel found acceptance with God, having offered a more excellent, more plentiful, or more efficacious sacrifice than Cain, thereby manifesting a simple faith in God's method of reconciliation, setting the first example to the Church of an unreserved reliance

on the promised Saviour, on the efficacy of the great Atonement, —so that by his sacrifice, that is, by the shedding of blood, “he, being dead, yet speaketh.” I do not doubt, therefore, that when Noah, for himself and his posterity, was permitted to use animals for food, but forbidden to eat blood, the reason of the prohibition was the same as that given in this passage,—namely, that the blood was that by which an atonement was made for his soul, and was not, therefore, to be used as a common thing.

It was not, indeed, expressly said so to Noah,—at least if it was, it has not been recorded. But I apprehend it was not necessary. Noah knew well the way of access to God, and the ground of reconciliation with him through sacrifice, or the shedding of blood: for the first thing that he did after coming out of the ark, and before he was permitted to use animals as food, and forbidden to eat blood, was to build an altar unto the Lord; and take of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offer burnt-offerings upon the altar. “And the Lord,” we are told, “smelled a sweet savour.” I doubt not, therefore, that Noah understood on what ground it was that he was forbidden to eat blood. He knew that, as a sinner, he had forfeited his own life to God as the righteous Lawgiver and Judge whom he had offended, and that the blood of the victim which he slew as his substitute was the atonement for his soul, the ransom of his forfeited life; and when therefore it was said to him, “Flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat,” he must have connected the prohibition with the institution of sacrifice,—that solemn and impressive as well as gracious ordinance, whereby God had imparted to him the assurance of his forgiveness and favour. Whatever might be the way in which a revelation had been made to Noah on the subject of the great Atonement, it is plain, I think, even from the very brief record which is given concerning him, that he knew much of that most interesting of all subjects,—that, like Abraham at a later period, he saw the day of Christ, though afar off, and was glad.

But it was evidently very different with the people of Israel at the time the prohibition was renewed, as recorded in this chapter. After their long sojourn in Egypt, and their familiarity with the abominations of that dark and idolatrous land,

they knew and understood little, compared with Noah or Abraham ; and hence one proof, among many, of the divine grace and condescension, in prescribing to them so many rites, calculated to explain and illustrate the great doctrine of reconciliation to God through the blood of atonement. At no time, perhaps, had they ever been absolute strangers to the ordinance of sacrifice, even during the season of their deepest depression in the house of bondage. But what a flood of light must have broken in upon every serious and thoughtful soul among them, by the institution of the great day of expiation or atonement, with all its solemn and most significant rites, whereby there was brought before them, not only the precious truth that every penitent, believing worshipper was forgiven, but also a very plain and intelligible explanation of the ground on which forgiveness was extended to the guilty ! These rites, as described in the preceding chapter, did most emphatically intimate to Israel that they lay under a charge of iniquity, transgression, and sin, the deserved and appropriate penalty of which was death ; and that, if this penalty was remitted to them, it was only in virtue of its being inflicted on the victim which was substituted in their place, on which their guilt was laid, and by which it was atoned for and carried away. The whole transaction was so simple in itself, and so clearly and fully explained, that it was hardly susceptible of being misunderstood ; and it was fitted, therefore, to leave a deep and lasting impression on their minds, that they bore about with them a ransomed life,—a life which had been forfeited, and recovered only by the sacrifice of another life in the room of theirs. The life so sacrificed, indeed, had no virtue or moral worth in itself whereby to redeem or purchase theirs. But while the sacrifice plainly taught them, that without the shedding of blood there was no remission, it did also teach them that there might be, and that there really was, remission by such shedding : and whatever, therefore, might be the extent to which they understood the great atonement of Christ, which was prefigured in the solemnities of the day of expiation, there was enough in the ordinance to render blood a sacred thing in their estimation, as that which was the immediate cause of all the relief and enlargement of heart which they derived from the hope of God's forgiving mercy.

The devout and reflecting could not fail to see, in that ordinance, the reason why they had been forbidden to eat blood, even though no farther explanation had been given of the ground of that prohibition: for it must have appeared to them a befitting ordination that they should not regard or use as a common thing, that by which an atonement was made for their soul. But none were left in doubt on the subject. The minute instructions regarding the holy services of the great annual atonement were followed up by the renewal of the prohibition against eating blood,—accompanied with the awful sanction, that if any one violated this injunction, God would set his face against that soul, and would cut him off from among the people: and it was, at the same time, expressly declared as the reason of the prohibition, that God had given them the blood upon the altar to make an atonement for their souls,—for that it was the blood which made an atonement for the soul. It was thus graciously provided, that they should constantly be reminded of the great truths which it did most nearly concern them to remember, namely, their own guiltiness, and the way in which their guilt was forgiven. In the careful attention which it was necessary for them to exercise, lest they should be chargeable with profaning what God had declared to be holy, their thoughts would be frequently turned towards that great solemnity in which God was revealed as a just God who cannot pass by sin unpunished: and if they were true believers,—if they apprehended, in any measure, the meaning of the promise made to their father Abraham, or the import of the ordinances which had been prescribed to themselves,—their hopes and expectations of the promised Saviour—the true and efficacious Atonement—would also be frequently revived and strengthened. And while the prohibition to eat blood did thus furnish a constant subject of salutary reflection to the humble and devout, by urging on their attention the necessity of an atonement as the ground of their reconciliation to God, it held out also, in the solemn sanction whereby it was enforced, an awful warning to the unbelieving and ungodly, that if they ventured to violate the prohibition, they would be chargeable, not only with transgressing an express commandment, but with profaning that holy thing which God had given them to make an atonement for their souls, and so with de-

spising and rejecting the only ground on which their guilt could be forgiven. "Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people."

It is, I doubt not, obvious to every one, that it was in reference to Christ that blood was thus commanded to be held sacred under the Old Testament economy. The ordinance, therefore, whereby blood was appointed for making an atonement, and, at the same time, forbidden to be eaten, is one of the most striking testimonies to be found in Scripture to the character of Christ, the glory of his person, the value of his atoning sacrifice in the sight of God, and the efficacy of his blood in cleansing the sinner's guilt. And in this point of view the ordinance, though no longer in force, and no longer needed, is as full of interest to the Church now, as it was in the beginning,—nay, it has acquired, in consequence of Christ's manifestation and finished work, a depth of meaning beyond what the Church of old could discover or understand. No doubt, the true Church then did regard as a very sacred thing that blood which God said he had given them upon the altar to make an atonement for their souls; and they would have trembled at the thought of profaning its sacredness by using it as a common thing, after being so solemnly forbidden to do so, and for the reason assigned in this passage. But how much more profound would have been the feeling of sacredness with which they looked on that blood, if they had seen as clearly as we now see, that it was a type of the precious blood of the Son of God, whereby he has redeemed and washed his people from their sins, and from which the blood of their own sin-offering derived all its efficacy and value! It must have been to them a season of very deep interest, while the high priest entered within the vail with the blood of the slain victim, and while they were waiting, in anxious and solemn silence, till he should return to announce the acceptance of their offering, and to bless them in the name of the Lord. But unspeakably more interesting still would have been that sacred ceremony if they had known as fully as we now know, that it prefigured the Son of God entering into heaven with his own blood, whither he returned after having, for a season, left it, that he might assume

our nature for the very purpose of shedding his blood as an atonement for sin, so that with that blood he might appear in the most holy place, the High Priest of his people, making intercession on their behalf, and securing for them all needful blessings.

Though the prohibition, therefore, was to be but of temporary duration, the interest which attaches to it is permanent. It shows that the death of Christ formed the grand subject of all the communications which God vouchsafed to men, even from the beginning,—and that the shedding of Christ's blood was that to which the attention of all God's intelligent creatures was to be directed, not only as in itself the most marvellous of all events, but that whereby the most glorious manifestation was to be given of the divine character,—a manifestation not less fitted to awaken awe than to inspire confidence. The apostle Peter reminds his believing brethren, that they had been redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ; and when the apostle Paul sought to impress the elders of the Church at Ephesus with a deep sense of their responsibility, he charged them to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood. And how impressively is this doctrine of the apostles, namely, the preciousness of Christ's blood, enforced in the passage under consideration, where the Church of old were forbidden to use even its type as a common thing, and where the prohibition was enforced by the awful sanction, "I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people!"

But while this passage thus reminds us of what has been the great subject of all God's communications to men since the fall, and sets forth, in a very emphatic manner, and in a way suited to the condition and circumstances of the Church at the time, the infinite value of that Atonement which he had provided, the sacredness of that blood which was shed for the remission of sins; it does also suggest the very solemn inquiry, whether we may not now be chargeable with lightly esteeming or profaning that blood, so as to incur the guilt with which Israel of old would have been chargeable if they had violated the injunction in this

passage. That injunction was intended to prevent them from thinking lightly of the blood which had been given them on the altar to make an atonement for their souls. They did not clearly see any other atonement than that which was offered in the slain victim; and the very victim itself by which their guilt was expiated and carried away being only typical, so it was by a typical lesson that they were taught to entertain right and worthy thoughts of that blood which was really to take away sin, and the efficacy of which was conveyed to the believing worshipper by the atonement under the ceremonial law. Now the real Atonement has been offered, and no such prohibition as that in the passage before us is required to teach us the value, the sacredness, the awful sanctity of the blood by which that atonement was made. It was the blood of God incarnate. This simple fact must convey to every humble and devout believer an unspeakably more profound sense of the preciousness of the atonement by which sin is taken away, than all the solemnities of the day of atonement, even when followed up by the declaration, "Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people."

But if these words thus declare that the typical blood of atonement might be typically profaned, and that such profanation amounted to a rejection of the proposed method of reconciliation between God and sinners; it does as plainly intimate that the same guilt may now be more directly and immediately contracted, by the profanation of the real blood of atonement which has once for all been shed for the remission of sins. If the blood of slain animals represented or typified Christ's blood, then the eating of the blood of animals must be held as representing the profanation of Christ's blood, or treating it as a common thing,—plainly implying that such guilt might be contracted under the new as well as under the old dispensation. And so it assuredly is. In fact, the great sin of all who have heard the Gospel, but have refused cordially to embrace it, is the very sin which was committed by the Israelites of old who violated the injunction contained in this passage. The guilt of such persons does not consist merely in refusing to repent and turn unto God,—

in deliberately preferring the service of sin to the service of their Maker,—in declaring that they are satisfied with such a portion as they can contrive to gather from the possession and enjoyment of the things of sense,—and in avowing that they do not believe his favour to be life, nor his loving-kindness to be better than life. All this they do virtually avow, so long as they seek in present things for what will satisfy their desires and render them truly happy,—and thus add every day to the guilt of all their unrepented of sins, by still refusing to forsake them and turn unto God.

But this is not the amount of their guilt. They are chargeable with another sin, not only of great magnitude in itself, but which goes incalculably to aggravate every other which they have committed. They lightly esteem the blood of Christ. But for that blood, there had been no room for repentance, and no way by which remission of sin could have been conveyed to them; for it is because he shed his blood that he has been exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the forgiveness of sins. But this blessing of repentance which Christ is exalted to bestow, only in virtue of his having shed his blood, is no blessing in their estimation. The very word is offensive to them. It awakens the idea of self-denial, which they cannot bear to think of,—a relinquishment of gratifications and pursuits which have hitherto yielded them all the happiness or satisfaction which they ever enjoyed,—and, instead of these, it prescribes to them the choice of a course of living in which they see great mortification, and no enjoyment. And such being their estimate of the blessing which none could ever have tasted or known if Christ had not shed his blood; in what light must they be held as regarding that blood itself? They may not be chargeable with any outward profanation of it, as Israel of old would have been, had they disobeyed the injunction which was given to them. But are they not lightly esteeming it? If they are pursuing their worldly courses, and enjoying their worldly comforts and gratifications, undisturbed by any anxious concern about the pardon of sin, and the way of escape from its punishment, while, at the same time, they are familiar with the words, at least, of the Scripture doctrine which teaches repentance, the remission of sin, and reconciliation with God through the blood

of the cross; are they not in reality saying that they see nothing to awaken their reverence, or call forth their admiration in that blood which the Scriptures have every where represented as so holy, so sacred, and of such infinite efficacy and value? And if at times they do feel somewhat impressed with the solemn declarations of the Word of God regarding the necessity of an atonement, and the death of Christ as the only atonement for the soul, while, at the same time, they do successfully resist such impressions, and hold by their former course of living and acting; are they not chargeable with something more aggravated still than lightly esteeming the blood of Christ, or treating it with careless indifference and neglect? By striving against the convictions of sin which are occasionally awakened, and by labouring to disbelieve or forget the truth that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse from all sin, and remove from the conscience a sense of guilt, are they not regarding his precious blood as if, instead of bringing with it the richest of all blessings, it inflicted upon them a grievance, reminding them of an obligation which they are not willing to remember, and laying them under a restraint from which they would gladly escape?

This rejection of Christ, on the part of those who have heard of pardon and eternal life through his blood, is the greatest of all their sins, and that which aggravates every other. Our Lord accordingly represents it as the immediate ground of men's condemnation; for having declared that God sent his Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved, he adds, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." And the apostle has, in a very solemn manner, pronounced on the guilt and danger of those who do thus set at nought the precious blood, whereby souls have been purchased. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy," a common "thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

But the passage before us suggests very salutary reflections

even to those who profess to entertain some right thoughts of the efficacy and value of Christ's blood. It is plain that among the people of Israel there might be some who would have shrunk from the thought of wilfully and presumptuously violating the injunction forbidding them to eat blood, but who might, nevertheless, from carelessness or inadvertency, be chargeable with the transgression of that commandment. And in so far as this carelessness arose from inadequate views, or low conceptions of the atonement made by blood,—a want of reverence for that holy ordinance,—they were not only ceremonially unclean, as the context declares, but they were chargeable with violating the spirit as well as the letter of the prohibition. And this consideration can hardly fail to remind us that a similar profanation of the blood of atonement may be chargeable upon professing Christians, for example, in their approaching the table of the Lord. There is reason, indeed, to fear that such profanation, and in a very aggravated form, is no uncommon thing; for there is too good ground to suspect that in every professedly Christian community there are many formalists and hypocrites,—many who have never known, and do not seriously desire to know, the infinite worth, and the sovereign virtue of that blood, the symbol of which they receive and partake of at a communion table; and in the case of all such, that blood is profaned. But the apostle declares that believers themselves may, to a certain, nay, to a great extent, be chargeable with this sin. "Whosoever," says he, "shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." And that believers might do so is evident from what he adds in regard to the Corinthians. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." If at any time, therefore, we have not found that quickening and comfort from the holy ordinance of the Supper, which the spiritual food therein provided is designed to be the means of imparting, let us inquire whether it is not owing to low and inadequate, and, therefore, unworthy views of

the blood of atonement,—of its moral worth in the sight of God as a satisfaction to the demands of his law, and of its healing power in the experience of sinners, purging their conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Nor is it in reference only to such occasions that this inquiry may be seasonably urged. There is reason to believe that the doubts, and fears, and anxieties of many humble inquirers,—many who are in earnest in seeking rest for their souls,—may be traced to inadequate views of Christ's blood as an all-sufficient atonement, in consequence of which they do in reality undervalue its efficacy to pacify their conscience, and to heal their wounded spirit. They do not, indeed, directly question the infinite value of that blood, nor avow, even to their own minds, any doubt of its unlimited virtue. But so long as they seek for something in themselves from which to draw encouragement to apply to Christ, they are, to that extent, cherishing a feeling of self-righteousness; and in so far as they do so, they are withholding from Christ the honour and glory which are due to him as having wrought out a free and full salvation,—they are, in reality, limiting the value and the virtue of the blood which he shed to make an atonement for their souls. It is thus that many continue long downcast and discouraged, ascribing, it may be, to humility, the doubts which spring from self-righteousness: nor will their doubts be removed till they clearly apprehend the Scripture warrant in the Gospel offer to go to Christ as they are, and believe that, be their guilt what it may, there is virtue in his blood to cleanse them from it all, without any previous diminution of its amount or its aggravation. And as it is in a clear and believing view of the efficacy of Christ's blood that they find relief from their fears and misgivings; so it is by cherishing exalted and honourable thoughts of the preciousness of that blood in the sight of God that they will be prompted to aim at, and to labour to attain, universal holiness of heart and life. At no time will sin appear to them more exceeding sinful, more loathsome and offensive, than when they have the liveliest apprehension of the glory and excellency of Him whose blood alone could make an atonement to God for it; for they will feel that they cannot make light of sin, without making light of that blood which was shed for its remission. That they are not their

own, that Christ has bought them with his own blood, and that with this blood he has entered into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for them, is a very solemn thought ; and if habitually entertained, and vividly realised, it will operate with overpowering influence in constraining them to live no more to themselves, but to Him who gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

XLVI.

THE JUBILEE.

LEVITICUS XXV. 8-12.

THE Jubilee is an institution full of interest and instruction, considered simply in reference to the people of Israel, and the immediate purposes which it was designed to serve towards them. Of these purposes, the first and the most obvious was to inculcate an habitual recognition of their dependence on God, and of his sovereign and inalienable right to bestow upon them possessions on any terms, and to dispose of these possessions in any way that might seem good to himself. And if it led them so to recognise his supremacy, and his absolute propriety in all that they had, the effect would be a life of faith on his Word ; because, with a constant sense of their entire dependence on him, they could not but feel that they had absolutely nothing on which they could reckon for the permanency of their possessions, but his promise. And this life of faith would also be a life of obedience ; because they could have no confidence in the fulfilment of God's promise, unless they acquiesced in the terms or conditions on which that promise was given. Such, it will be found, was the primary, the more immediate design of the institution of the Jubilee. And it was not the only, though perhaps the most remarkable ordinance of the Mosaic economy which had for its object the same great practical effect. We read, in a preceding part of the Scriptures, of three great feasts or festivals, namely, the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Feast of

Tabernacles, at each of which, all the males of Israel were required to appear before the Lord God, in the place which he should choose to put his name there.

At first sight, there may appear to have been no other difficulty in complying with this command, than merely the inconvenience which multitudes must have experienced in being thereby required to undertake a long, expensive, and, it may be, a very fatiguing journey. But when we reflect, that after the establishment of the people of Israel in Canaan, to which the commandment especially referred, they were surrounded by powerful and inveterate enemies,—nay, that large and warlike bodies of the original inhabitants of the land dwelt in the very midst of them, ready and eager to take any opportunity of wreaking their vengeance on those who had forcibly, and as they no doubt thought, unjustly, taken possession of their country; we cannot fail to perceive that it was a very perilous thing for them to leave their wives and children, their sick brethren, their aged and infirm parents, not to speak of their flocks and herds, and all their worldly substance, exposed defenceless to the assaults of enemies sufficiently powerful, and abundantly willing to avail themselves of such an opportunity of plundering, at least, if not of taking possession of their land. Yet the command was imperative, that all the males who were able, that is, all who alone could defend their homes from the inroad of bitter and revengeful enemies, should, thrice in the year, thus leave their homes unprotected,—receiving, however, this security from the mouth of the Lord himself, “I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders; neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year.” No doubt this was ample security,—the pledged promise of Him who is the Supreme Ruler in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, and who exercises a most holy, and wise, and powerful control over all his creatures, and all their actions. But it was a promise which could impart no comfort, and awaken no feeling of security in the minds of the people of Israel, except in so far as they implicitly believed it. No outward visible provision was made for the protection of the families and flocks of those who went to present themselves before the Lord. God said that he would so control the hearts of the

enemies of Israel, that they would not desire the land in the absence of those who could alone resist such enemies. But they were required implicitly to rely on this promise ; believing that an agency, altogether unseen by mortal eye, would be in mysterious operation, laying a restraint on the adversaries who would otherwise, without fail, have broken forth on their defenceless families, and laid waste their land in the absence of its natural defenders. So peremptorily were the people of God in the old time required to rely exclusively on his simple word, or, in the emphatic language of the apostle, to "walk by faith, not by sight."

And so, in like manner, were they required to act by another ordinance, the institution of which is recorded in the 23d chapter of the book of Exodus, but repeated in the immediately preceding context. It is in these words:—"When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof ; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord : thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard." At first sight, perhaps, this commandment might be more startling to the people of Israel than even that which required all their males to appear before the Lord thrice in the year, in the place which he should choose to put his name there : for on receiving such a command, they could hardly fail to inquire, with equal anxiety and surprise, in what way they were to subsist during the seventh year, if in that year they were neither to sow their field nor prune their vineyard. And accordingly, God was graciously pleased to anticipate this, perhaps, natural enough fear, and to give them a promise or assurance which, if they implicitly believed it, would effectually remove that fear. "If," said he, "ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year ? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase ; then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year ; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store."

This was indeed a very large promise, absolutely securing to

them much more than was actually necessary for supplying the want of the seventh year's produce. But then, it was only in so far as they believed it, that it could remove their fears, and their anticipations of want; and they were thus required to rely implicitly and exclusively on the divine faithfulness for a supply which no efforts of their own could have secured, and for which they saw no outward visible provision,—nothing but the simple word of God. No doubt, when the sixth year arrived, and they saw the abundance of its produce,—when they beheld their fields bringing forth as it were by handfuls, they would feel relieved by such a palpable proof of God's faithfulness, and would thus be prepared for leaving their land unsown during the seventh year, without the dread of famine or of scarcity. In this respect, the trial of their faith regarding the sabbath or rest of their land during the seventh year, might not be so severe as in the case of their being required to leave their homes thrice a year, without any visible security for the protection of those whom they left behind them,—and no security at all but the simple promise, "Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year."

But though they had thus a palpable proof of the faithfulness of God's promise—in fact the fulfilment of it—before the moment arrived which was to determine whether or not they could venture to cast themselves upon it, and, on the faith of it, leave their land untilled; yet that promise had a great deal to contend with, as the promises of God still have, in the carnal desires, and unbelieving suggestions of a corrupt heart. Though amply provided with the means of subsistence independently of the produce of the seventh year, their covetousness might prompt the question, Why should we lose the produce of that year? What necessity is there for such a sacrifice as this ordinance requires? And in this spirit they might be induced gradually to encroach on the commandment, and might come to believe that they would not only be equally secured against want, but, in the end, possessed of greater abundance by disregarding, than by observing the divine institution. And in point of fact they did at length come so to reason, and to act: for the violation of this ordinance was at a future period expressly assigned as one

of the main causes of the terrible judgment which overtook them when they were carried into captivity among the heathen, so that "the land rested and enjoyed her sabbaths," "because it did not rest in their sabbaths, when they dwelt upon it." But whatever the people of Israel might make of the ordinance, it was not only befitting the sovereignty of God, as the proprietor of all things in heaven and on earth, thus to require, on their part, a distinct recognition of his supremacy, and of their dependence; but it was a very gracious appointment, fitted to keep alive in their minds a grateful recollection of all the wonderful works which he had done on their behalf, and to furnish them with a permanent proof of his unceasing watchfulness over them. And if they had thus lived by faith on the simple word of God, in opposition to the dictates of sense, and the carnal reasonings of their unbelieving hearts; what a glorious testimony would they have borne in the sight of the heathen to the sovereignty, power, and faithfulness of the only living and true God! And how truly might they have said, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?"

These remarks on the ordinance now referred to are, it is obvious, equally applicable to that of the Jubilee. The latter, being itself a seventh or sabbatical year, was of course subject to all the regulations of that institution. During that year they were not to sow, nor reap, nor gather the grapes of their vineyard. Whatever the land produced of itself was common, or might be used by any one who found it in the field. But, in addition to all this, the Jubilee was to be introduced with the sound of the trumpet throughout all the land; liberty was to be proclaimed to all slaves and prisoners, and all estates which had been sold, or otherwise alienated, were to be restored to their former owners, or to the survivors of the families to which they originally belonged. It is plain that such an ordinance as this, or even the sabbatical year itself, never would have been adopted by Israel or any other people of their own accord; inasmuch as, in various ways, it was opposed to the selfishness of human nature, and prescribed limits to the gratification of covetousness, which must have been peculiarly offensive to the very persons whose influence was greatest,—namely, un-

godly men who had accumulated great possessions, and whose interest it would be, therefore, to alter or set aside the law of the Jubilee. And of the truth of this remark we have abundant evidence in the subsequent history of Israel in the days of their degeneracy. The fact, then, that they did adopt or act upon such an ordinance, affords one of the most striking testimonies to the divine authority of the Mosaic institutions,—because it is a fact of which no rational explanation can be given, but on the supposition that the Jubilee was instituted by the express appointment of God, and that a divine power was exercised in accommodating the condition of the people of Israel to that institution. Considered as an assertion of God's sovereignty over Israel, his exclusive claim to their service, and his absolute right of propriety in the land which he had given them, nothing could be better fitted than the Jubilee was to keep them habitually in mind of what they were but too prone to forget, that they had no right to any portion of the land of Canaan but on such terms, and to such an extent, as in His sovereign good pleasure He might see fit to allot to them. Such, accordingly, was the reason which He did himself assign for the regulation by which estates were to return to their original possessors in the year of jubilee. "The land," said He, "shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers, and sojourners with me." Nor was the institution more befitting the Divine Majesty, asserting his sovereignty as the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, than it was beneficent and gracious towards the people of Israel; for what could be more salutary, more conducive to their true happiness, than an ordinance which not only required, but provided for their living together as one great family, dependent on the same Father, and each having the same right and security for his portion, whether small or great,—even the immediate grant of Him who is the Proprietor of all things? And how high and distinguished the honour which was conferred upon them in being made witnesses for God, exhibiting to the nations around them such a proof of the divine sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, as no other people had ever manifested! For, so long as they observed the ordinances of which we have been speaking,—ordinances so contrary to all that human wisdom and policy would have dictated,—they not only

enjoyed internal peace and prosperity, but were protected by an unseen agency from the inroad of foreign foes ; so that notwithstanding their sabbatical years and years of jubilee, during which they neither sowed nor reaped, they required no aid from without to supply their wants ; neither did any man desire their land, when they went up to appear before the Lord their God thrice in the year.

But Israel degenerated from what they were in the time of Joshua, and of the elders that outlived Joshua,—they forgot the mighty works which God had done for their fathers,—and they became weary of living by faith on God's word, as their only and all-sufficient security. They thought that their own wisdom could provide more largely for their wants, and that their own strength could better defend them from their enemies, than the observance of ordinances which afforded no visible security for either. And, adopting the maxims and practices of the nations around them, they thought themselves wiser and safer by acting as other men did,—little dreaming that when they forsook ordinances of which they had become weary, and relinquished the faith in God's word without which they could never have had courage to observe these ordinances, their strength also departed from them, and they became weak, and were, indeed, like other men. But though, in their sin and folly, they ceased to testify for God, he did not cease to testify, by them, to himself. When they refused to confide in his word, and so glorify him by their prosperity, he vindicated his truth and faithfulness in their adversity ; for when they dishonoured his Sabbaths, and refused to the land her sabbath—her seventh year's rest,—and when, in the year of jubilee, they denied to their man-servant and their maid-servant the boon which God, the Lord and Proprietor of their land, had solemnly given and secured to them by his own ordinance,—when they would not hearken unto the Lord, to proclaim liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour ; then said the Lord to them by the mouth of his prophet, “Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine : and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”

The institution of the Jubilee, like various other ordinances,

was thus designed and fitted to impress Israel with a sense of their dependence on God, and to inculcate faith in his word as their only security, and the only powerful motive also to cheerful obedience. But it is plain, I think, that another purpose of that ordinance was to do honour to the Sabbath,—to give the greatest possible prominence and importance to that holy institution. The injunction to sanctify or keep holy the Sabbath is more frequently repeated in Scripture than perhaps any other precept of the divine law,—a fact which we can hardly help regarding as a plain intimation that it is a precept of which men are prone to become in a peculiar manner impatient; and the history of all ages has afforded abundance of melancholy evidence that it is so. But not only was the precept in its simple form thus frequently repeated,—clearly intimating how essential God saw it to be for maintaining any thing like his fear and worship among men;—he was pleased to make the institution of that holy day the groundwork or foundation of other institutions, whereby its value as a privilege, and its binding nature as a law, might be presented in a more prominent and palpable form. The appointment of the seventh year's rest to the land was introduced at first in close connection with the command regarding the Sabbath. "Six years," it is said in the twenty-third chapter of Exodus, "thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat,"—that is, gather freely of what they find in the fields produced naturally, which would not be little in a land like Canaan, especially with the blessing of God;—"and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner shalt thou deal with thy vineyard, and with thy olive-yard." And then is added, in the next sentence, a renewal of the commandment concerning the Sabbath: "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed."

But the intended connection between the weekly Sabbath, and the seven years' rest to the land, is still more emphatically marked in the preceding context, where that year is expressly called the sabbath of the land: "When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the

Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof ; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord : thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard." In like manner, the institution of the Jubilee is expressed in peculiar language, obviously designed to connect that remarkable season with the ordinance of the Sabbath. It is not simply said, Thou shalt number seven times seven, or forty-nine years, and then cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound. The language of the institution is, "Thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years ; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound." Care was thus taken to connect the seventh year, and the year of jubilee, with the Sabbath, as that which gave to them a character of sacredness and solemnity ; while in their turn they served to show very impressively what an important place the Sabbath occupied in the sight of God. It is plain that the divine purpose was to set forth that holy day as an emblem of his rest, and as a season which to his people should be a pledge and earnest of their entering into that rest. Nothing, therefore, could more clearly, or in a more affecting and melancholy manner, disclose the ungodliness or unbelief of the people of Israel, than their profanation of God's holy day, after all that he had said and done to show them its inestimable value as a privilege ; and, accordingly, nothing is more frequently referred to by the prophets, who were sent affectionately to remonstrate with them on their backsliding, than their profaning the sacredness and undervaluing the preciousness of God's holy day. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day ; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable ; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words ; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord ; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father ; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

But much as was done to impress Israel with a deep and abiding sense of the value of the Sabbath, as a pledge and fore-

taste of the rest which remaineth for the people of God, we have in the resurrection of Christ a still more affecting testimony to the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath, as a precious privilege. We no longer need a sabbatical year, or a jubilee, to remind us of that privilege; for what could give sacredness and value to that day in our estimation, if Christ's rising from the dead and entering into his rest should fail to do so?

But the institution of the Jubilee, as recorded in the passage we are now considering, may suggest some very solemn reflections. Had that ordinance been still in force, there are many among us who would have witnessed it,—for many of us have numbered seven times seven years, and therefore many of us have seen and spent Sabbaths which, of themselves, amount to seven years. Have these, then, been the happiest and the most highly valued years of our life? And had we now a jubilee to celebrate, would it be one of the subjects of our thanksgiving, one of the causes of our joy and rejoicing, that we had been favoured with so many seasons of repose from the toil and travail of this sinful state,—and had on so many occasions been refreshed by a foretaste of that rest which remaineth for the people of God? Perhaps there are none of us who can seriously entertain this question, without feeling that we have reason to mourn as well as rejoice, on taking a review of our Sabbaths; for while we may recollect the time when we knew little or nothing whatever of the value of the Sabbath, we may also have to confess that even since we have experienced something of the rest of which the Sabbath is at once the emblem and the pledge, we have grievously come short of honouring and improving that holy season as we ought to have done. But is there not reason to fear, that there are multitudes who would be disposed to say, in reply to such a question, Seven years of Sabbaths! what a waste of time and loss of productive labour to the community! There are comparatively few, perhaps, who would have the hardihood to express this sentiment in so many words. But I fear that the sentiment itself is no uncommon one, and that not a few now are secretly saying with backsliding Israel of old, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?”

But it is not merely in regard to the Sabbath, and the value

of that blessed day as a privilege, that the passage we are considering is fitted to suggest reflections alike solemn and instructive. It is also fitted to bring before us, as I believe it was designed to typify, the preaching of the Gospel,—the proclamation of the glad tidings of an Almighty Saviour, and a full, a free remission of the penalty of sin, and emancipation from its power. The passage before us informs us that the trumpet of the jubilee was sounded on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement,—that great and memorable day on which the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies, and when rites were observed which prefigured or shadowed forth the nature, design, and consequences of Christ's death more fully, as well as more clearly, than any other of the manifold types by which he was presented to the faith and hope of the Old Testament Church. We cannot, therefore, avoid seeing, in the institution of the Jubilee, a very lively representation of what followed the resurrection and ascension of Christ, when, as the high priest of his Church, he entered into the most holy place, even into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for them. But we have the authority of Scripture for thus connecting these two things together as type and antitype; for it was in obvious allusion to the Jubilee that the prophet, or rather Christ by the mouth of his prophet, thus spoke: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And most literally was this fulfilled, not only in the person of Christ himself during his public ministry, but when, after his resurrection, he commanded his disciples to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel, proclaim the good news, to every creature under heaven, even the glad tidings of liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound; and when, after his ascension, he poured out upon them of his Holy Spirit, qualifying them to make this proclamation to men of every tongue, and country, and kindred.

Nor was it merely an external resemblance which the proclamation of the Jubilee bore to the preaching of the Gospel,—the

one being universal throughout the land of Judea,—the other universal in regard to the world at large. They resembled each other also in their very nature,—in the essence of the things which they respectively proclaimed ; for never was freedom more fully and unconditionally announced to the bondmen of Israel in the year of jubilee, than is spiritual liberty now to every sinner without exception by the Gospel. It is true, the Gospel proclaims a spiritual emancipation, and men, being naturally insensible to the evils of spiritual bondage, may receive the announcement of deliverance which it brings in a very different way and with very different feelings from those with which the bondmen of Israel heard the trumpet of the jubilee. But men's reception of the Gospel does not alter its nature. Whatever sinners may make of it, or in whatever way they treat it, it is essentially an unconditional proclamation of "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and to the weary and heavy laden soul that so understands and believes it, it will bring immediate enlargement and relief,—enlargement not less real, and far more glorious than ever prisoner experienced on being delivered from earthly bondage.

We now live, therefore, under a perpetual jubilee,—the unceasing sound of that trumpet which proclaims glad tidings of great joy, even glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men,—for no sinner can open this blessed Book, or listen to its precious contents, without being personally invited, and entreated, and commanded to "believe the record that God gave of his Son,"—namely this, "that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." And to those who have heard and believed the glad tidings of the Gospel,—who have experienced deliverance from a sense of unforgiven guilt, and the dread of coming wrath,—and have tasted the blessedness of that liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free,—to such redeemed captives the passage before us can hardly fail to suggest the thought of another and a still more glorious jubilee that awaits them,—even that day on which shall be proclaimed the release of their bodies from the prison-house of the grave,—when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised,—when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and "then shall be brought to pass the

saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." In the prospect of that day, indeed, there may sometimes be more of solemn awe than of joyful anticipation : for it is a very awful thought that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,"—that all who sleep in the dust shall hear his voice and come forth,—and that all must stand at his judgment-seat. But the faith which realises the solemnities of that day should also realise in the person of the Judge the compassionate Saviour on whom we have been taught or enabled to rely ; and if, in the exercise of this faith, we are frequently familiar in thought with the glory of His second coming, that event will become more and more the subject of joyful hope,—a source of consolation amidst all our present trials. So it is intended to be, as the Scriptures do plainly testify ; for it was to comfort suffering Christians in their tribulations that we find the apostle so frequently alluding to the glories of the resurrection day. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

XLVII.

THE ARK SETTING FORWARD AND RESTING.

NUMBERS X. 35, 36.

THE spectacle which presented itself to Moses when the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony, and the children of Israel took their journeys, and the ark of the Lord set forward, was itself fitted to awaken in his mind some such sentiment as is expressed in the passage before us—"Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered." The marching of Israel, as described in the second chapter of this book, and in the preceding verses of the chapter before us, was assuredly the most sublime and imposing procession that ever was exhibited. In the instructions given to Moses respecting the places in which the tribes of Israel were to pitch their tents when they encamped, and the order in which they were to set forth when they advanced, it was said, "Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch." "But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel." Then followed minute directions as to the positions which the different tribes were to occupy in reference to the tabernacle, and the order in which they were to march. "On the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies,"—consisting of the tribes of Judah,

Issachar, and Zebulun, and amounting in number to an hundred thousand, and fourscore thousand, and six thousand, and four hundred. And these were first to set forth. On the south side of the tabernacle was to be the standard of the camp of Reuben according to their armies, consisting of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, and amounting in number to an hundred thousand, and fifty and one thousand, and four hundred and fifty. And they were to set forward in the second rank. Then the tabernacle of the congregation was to set forward in the midst of the camp of the Levites, followed by the other two great divisions of the tribes of Israel, namely, the camp of Ephraim, consisting of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, and amounting in number to an hundred thousand, and eight thousand, and an hundred; and the camp of Dan, consisting of the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, and amounting in number to an hundred thousand, and fifty and seven thousand, and six hundred. And thus on the day when the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of testimony, there was to be seen the ark of the covenant of the Lord carried in the midst of the Levites, preceded by the armies of one half of the tribes, and followed by those of the other,—an host of six hundred thousand men from twenty years old and upward, all able to go forth to war,—while the cloud which usually rested on the tabernacle went before them to search out a resting-place for them.

We may conceive somewhat, though very feebly, of the impression which such a sight must have made on the mind of Moses. He had set out from Egypt with a vast multitude of miserable, oppressed slaves, utterly unprepared to encounter difficulties, and, in the servile spirit which slavery never fails to generate, ready, on the first appearance of danger, to bow down at the feet of their oppressors, and to return to the almost intolerable bondage from which they had made their escape. In the course of a few months he beheld, as in triumphant procession, an army of six hundred thousand men able for war; not only organised, and advancing towards the inheritance which had been promised to them, but providing a guard for perhaps thrice that number of women and children, with their flocks and herds; and presenting an array of strength and numbers fitted to strike

terror into the hearts of the most warlike people that might venture to oppose them.

But the sight, as Moses saw it, presented no incentive to pride, —no ground for glorying in human strength. It was too obviously the doing of the Lord to awaken in his mind, and in that of every devout Israelite, any other feeling than that of humble admiration, and a sense of their dependence. But when he beheld such a mighty host, marshalled by divine command, and marching through the waste howling wilderness under the divine guidance, he must have anticipated, with a confidence which he had not before felt, a final victory over all opposition. That they were to be prepared for maintaining a conflict was plainly intimated to them by the very instructions which Moses received when he was commanded to number the children of Israel from twenty years old and upwards, all that were able to go forth to war; and they were as plainly warned that this conflict was to be carried on by means of their own personal exertions, put forth in actual combat with the nations whose lands they were to possess. When Moses, therefore, saw the armies of Israel going forward at a signal given by God himself, the irresistible conviction carried to his mind must have been that Israel would assuredly be victorious. Even comparing men with men, and judging on human probabilities, an unconcerned onlooker might have concluded that such an array as he saw before him must have been more than sufficient for the discomfiture of any force that could be brought against them. But viewing that armament as Moses must have viewed it, not merely as a mighty host united and disciplined by human skill, but as found created, so to speak, in the midst of a waste and desolate wilderness by the immediate interposition of God himself,—there was in the very appearance of that host a pledge, which no believing Israelite, any more than Moses, could doubt, that Israel could not be defeated; and in the full anticipation of this result, he might well exclaim,—“Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.”

But the language here employed by Moses was not merely the expression of a feeling naturally awakened in his mind on beholding the magnificent spectacle of Israel marching through

the wilderness, contrasted as that spectacle must have been in his recollection with the condition of the same people in Egypt, wasted in body and broken in spirit, under the oppression of their cruel taskmasters. The language which he used was dictated by the Holy Spirit: it was the language of prayer; and it was prophetic. That it was a prayer is abundantly obvious from the language itself; and that it was the prayer of faith,—that is, warranted by a divine revelation, and a revelation firmly believed and confided in by Moses,—is not less obvious from the many clear and express communications which he had received, and which are recorded in this and the two preceding books of the Bible.

It was a prayer for the accomplishment of a purpose,—the fulfilment of a promise originally made known to Abraham, and frequently repeated to his children after him. That purpose, revealed in the form of a promise, was, that God was to drive out the Amorites,—the inhabitants of Canaan,—before the people of Israel, who were to inherit the land. And it was not a conditional promise, to be fulfilled only in the event of the people of Canaan not repenting,—that is to say, it was not given as a contingent promise,—as a promise that peradventure might not be fulfilled, because the people of Canaan might peradventure turn from their wickedness, so that God would turn from his fierce anger, and repent him of the evil which he thought and threatened to do unto them. The execution of his purpose, indeed, or the fulfilment of his promise, was delayed for four hundred years after the first revelation of it to Abraham, and expressly on the ground that the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. But, in the divine foreknowledge, it was as certain that their iniquity would be filled up, as it was at the period referred to in the passage before us, when, at the expiration of the four hundred years, it was found to be a matter of fact that their iniquity was full. The promise, therefore, was made to Abraham, and renewed to his posterity, in the most unqualified or unconditional terms; and when Moses, therefore, prayed in the words of the passage we are now considering, he prayed for what he knew to be in accordance with the divine will, even for the accomplishment of a divine purpose, and, consequently, for success in battle to the people of Israel, as the appointed instruments or means whereby that purpose was to be carried into effect.

And this consideration, I think, ought to satisfy those who, in regard to such a prayer as that in the passage before us, and of which many examples occur in Scripture, have felt some difficulty in understanding how true believers should pray for the destruction of their enemies. It is to be remembered, that when the people of God did so pray, it was not for the success of a scheme of their own devising, whereby they might fancy or contrive to persuade themselves that God's glory would be advanced, and the interests of the true religion promoted. They did not sit down to consider, without any divine warrant or direction, how the cause of truth would be benefited by the destruction of such and such persons whom they believed to be the enemies of the truth, and then proceed to make it a subject of prayer that their enemies might be destroyed accordingly. Far less were these prayers dictated by feelings of personal animosity, as if they were warranted to ask for the judgments of God on those who had injured or offended them. It was God's method of acting under the Old Testament dispensation, to promote the cause of truth, to vindicate his supremacy and moral government, by visiting with temporal judgments the impenitent and ungodly who opposed his cause. This method or plan of procedure he was pleased not only to make known to his people, but to commit to them as his instruments or agents for carrying it into effect; it was thus their duty, a solemn obligation laid upon them by the express command of God, to execute the commission which they had received; and, therefore, what it was their duty to do, it became also their duty to pray for, being expressly assured that it was in accordance with the will of God.

To wish and pray for the advancement of God's glory, the triumph of truth over error, the prevalence of pure and undefiled religion, has been from the beginning, and ever must be, the duty of the Church,—the people of God; and this duty was not the less incumbent on the Old Testament saints, because they knew by direct revelation that the object for which they prayed was to be brought about by the infliction of divine judgments on the enemies of the truth. It was in their knowing this to be the divine purpose that their condition in reference to the duty of praying for the advancement of God's glory mainly differed from that of believers now. We have no warrant to

pray for divine judgments on any man or class of men, because we have not been told that in any given case it is by such judgments that God has purposed to advance his own cause. But we are bound to pray for the advancement of that cause, the triumph of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan ; and for any thing we know, the accomplishment of the object for which we thus pray may involve in it the infliction of more terrible judgments than any which have yet come upon the earth. Indeed, the whole tenor of Scripture prophecy, especially the prophecy with which the divine record closes, seems plainly to intimate that times of great tribulation are yet coming, and that, too, in connection with the establishment of Christ's kingdom. But while this consideration ought to be with Christians a powerful motive to exertion in spreading the Gospel throughout the world as the means of averting these judgments, it can never cease to be their duty earnestly to pray for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, as it was the duty of Moses to say, " Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered ; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

But the language of Moses was not merely expressive of his zeal for the honour of God,—a prayer dictated by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the divine purposes. It was also prophetic. And viewed in this light, the sentiment which it expresses must appear still farther removed from any thing like personal feeling on the part of Moses, or any indifference to the sufferings of a fellow-creature. He was, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, commanded to utter and to record, as a solemn warning to Israel, the purpose of God to visit with righteous retribution the impenitent nations of Canaan, —a warning rendered peculiarly solemn and impressive from the part which the Israelites themselves were to take in the execution of that purpose. This prediction was expressed in the form of a prayer, intimating that Moses acquiesced, as it was his duty to do, in God's holy purpose ; and we cannot doubt that to him, as well as to every devout Israelite, the revelation of that purpose would convey a very awful idea of the holiness and justice of God, and of the punishment which he cannot fail, without denying himself, sooner or later to inflict on the ungodly and impenitent.

The remark is applicable not only to the prayer of Moses, but to many other prayers of the prophets recorded in the Scriptures; and their plain import, therefore, is, that when these prophets uttered and recorded such prayers, they were announcing the divine purpose as that had been revealed to them; and in announcing it in the form of a prayer, they expressed not any pleasure in the destruction of sinners, but their humble acknowledgment of the divine rectitude, saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

And that the prayer of Moses was prophetic is abundantly evident from the subsequent history of Israel. The passage before us contains a description, very concise indeed, but very comprehensive and faithful, of the great events which took place from the time at which Israel first came into conflict with the nations which opposed their progress towards and their settlement in the land of Canaan, till the day on which it was said that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about. Of every one of these conflicts, when engaged in with the divine approbation, it might be literally said, when the ark set forward with the host of Israel, that the Lord rose up, and his enemies were scattered, and they that hated him did flee before him. And not less truly prophetic was the prayer of Moses when the ark of God rested,—an intimation that the armies of Israel were again to encamp. As in the day of battle the Lord covered their head, and discomfited their enemies before them; so when the conflict ceased, the Lord returned to the sanctuary which they had built for the dwelling-place of his glory, that by his presence in the midst of them they might have the assurance of his protection, and enjoy security and peace in knowing that they dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and did abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Every new conflict in which Israel engaged, and every season of rest which followed that conflict, bore a new testimony to the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of the purpose foretold in the passage before us; and when at length, towards the close of Joshua's life, Israel had been established in Canaan, and the Lord had long given them rest from all their enemies round about,—and when Joshua was able to appeal to the people themselves, and say, "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that

not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you ; all are come to pass unto you ; and not one thing hath failed thereof ;"—all that they then experienced was comprehended in the prophetic prayer uttered by Moses when their fathers left the wilderness of Sinai, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered ; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel."

But the prediction in the passage before us was not exhausted even by the triumph of Israel over all the enemies which opposed their entrance into Canaan, and by their final and peaceful settlement there. The sight which Moses beheld when he uttered these words was typical, and, therefore, the words themselves were prophetic of a far more glorious object than any thing that the camp of Israel could exhibit. We find David, at the distance of nearly five hundred years, offering up the same prayer that Moses offered, and on a similar occasion,—thereby plainly intimating, that the object prayed for was a permanent object of interest to the Church in his time. The 68th Psalm, which was composed by David on the occasion of his removing the ark from the house of Abinadab, where it had remained from the time that the Philistines had been compelled to send it back, and carrying it to Mount Zion, commences with the very words of the passage before us ; "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered ; let them also that hate him flee before him."

The occasion might be supposed very naturally to bring to David's recollection the first removal of the ark from the wilderness of Sinai, where it was constructed, and where it received its sacred deposit, the tables of the ten commandments,—the law of God,—concerning which Christ, the Antitype of the ark, said, "O my God, thy law is within my heart." And if that event was brought to his recollection, he could not but call to mind also the many marvellous deliverances which by means of the ark had already been wrought for Israel. And it is plain from the subsequent verses of the Psalm that these events did form the subject of his devout meditation. Indeed, he says so plainly ; for in the seventh verse of that Psalm he refers especially to the removal of Israel from their encampment, to resume their journey towards Canaan,—and he does so in language which clearly

shows that his mind was filled with profound admiration in contemplating that marvellous sight: "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel."

But he proceeds to describe an achievement unspeakably more glorious than any thing that had yet been done for Israel, or any thing that he was to be instrumental in achieving,—even the accomplishment of a work which can be nothing less than the mediatorial work of Christ himself,—thereby plainly teaching, by the authority of the Holy Spirit, that the glorious marching of the ark of God in the wilderness was a type of Christ going forth to establish his kingdom on the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." And that this was a prediction of Christ's ascension into heaven, after having accomplished, in his state of humiliation, the work which his Father had given him to do, is placed beyond all doubt by the express words of the apostle, who, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, directly applies the words of the Psalmist to Christ when he says, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

It appears, then, that the passage before us, so far as it was prophetic, though primarily spoken of the ark of God conducting Israel through the wilderness, did mainly refer to Christ going forth in the greatness of his strength to overthrow the kingdom of darkness, and to conduct his redeemed people to the inheritance prepared for them. One great and glorious part of this work he has accomplished in having, by his obedience unto the

death, satisfied the justice of God on their behalf, and thereby bought or purchased them to himself, having shed his blood as the price of their deliverance, being the true Passover slain for them. But another part of that great work he still continues to carry on,—that of conducting every successive generation of his people through this their wilderness state towards the promised inheritance, the rest that remaineth for the people of God. And it is especially to this view of our Lord's mediatorial work that our attention is naturally directed by the passage before us. And what a glorious subject does it not present to the contemplation of the devout believer! We have already seen that the marching of Israel through the wilderness, as described in these chapters, must have been a sight of surpassing grandeur, fitted to awaken in every reflecting mind a sublime conception of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of the Lord God of Israel. But unspeakably more sublime is the thought of Christ leading his redeemed people, by his secret and unseen power, through all the variety of circumstances in which they are placed, and providing for the spiritual safety and support of each one of them, as certainly as he did of old conduct every individual in the camp of Israel.

The condition of the Old Testament Church, as having received only a partial revelation, required that the divine care which was exercised over them should be made palpable to their senses; and so, accordingly, God was pleased to deal with them, by bringing them together into one united body, assigning to each the place which he was to occupy, and visibly going before them to guide them to a place of habitation. But believers now need not such outward or sensible proofs to be assured that in the sight of Him who is their living Head, and to whom the government of this world has been committed, the places of all his people, however diversified their circumstances, or however obscure their condition, are as clearly marked out and allotted to them as if they constituted one body, separated from a world lying in sin; and that each individual is as much under the protection of his power and the guidance of his Spirit as the feeblest of the host of Israel were under the safeguard of the pillar of cloud. They will see in the minute instructions given to Moses, respecting the order in which the tribes of Israel were

to encamp and advance, so many tokens or assurances of Christ's presence with and watchfulness over his Church as a body, however widely separated, and however little known to one another. And while such a sublime view of the sovereignty and faithfulness of Christ cannot fail to awaken their admiration, and call forth the homage of their adoration and praise, how full is it of instruction and encouragement in regard both to the advancement of his kingdom and their own spiritual interests!

In the great work which he is still carrying on, for extending his dominion, and subduing the nations under him, his people now, like Israel of old, are the instruments or agents which he employs for carrying his purposes into effect; and every effort which they make, in simplicity, and with an honest desire to promote his glory, forms a part, small it may be, but still a part, of that system of means which he has appointed for the furtherance of his cause. They may, however, be discouraged when they compare the weakness of their efforts with the magnitude of the object to be accomplished, and may feel as if their agency could not help on, any more than the want of it could impede, the great work of advancing the Redeemer's kingdom. But did they realise the truth which we have now been considering,—did they see by the eye of faith Christ himself going forth before and amidst his people, conquering and to conquer,—did they perceive him calling forth by his Spirit the zeal and the active exertions of his followers, separated and unknown to one another as they may be,—and did they conceive of him gathering up these scattered exertions, uniting them, and bringing them to bear on the accomplishment of the same object, as surely and as effectually as if each individual had seen and fixed upon that object, how would it animate and encourage them to embrace every opportunity of helping on in any degree the spread of the Gospel among their fellow-men! And who has not observed examples of such a combination of influences employed to bring about spiritual good, without any previous concert on the part of the agents so employed, the one unconsciously preparing the way for the labours of the other,—or, in the emphatic language of Scripture, one sowing and another reaping? They cannot indeed doubt, that seeing Christ has purposed to employ the

agency of his people for the establishment and extension of his kingdom, he has in his infinite wisdom allotted to them their sphere of influence, and will by his almighty power control and direct that influence, as really and unerringly as if they were visibly separated from the rest of the world, and with one consent united in the prosecution of the same object. And did they bear this truth in mind, how would it rebuke them for the hopeless inactivity to which they do at times surrender themselves, as well as encourage them when they are actively engaged in the service of Christ! And if such were the views which they habitually cherished regarding the control which Christ is continually exercising over his people, how would it reconcile them to the circumstances of their lot, not only because it would remind them that it is the lot of his fixing,—the place which he has assigned to them in the camp of Israel,—but because, if he employs them in his service, and calls them to take part in the conflict which is going on between his kingdom and the kingdom of darkness, they shall also participate in those gracious communications of his Spirit whereby he manifests to the Church,—the many thousands of Israel,—his presence in the midst of them, and by which he refreshes his heritage when it is weary! And the enjoyment of such seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord cannot fail to lead their thoughts forward to the glorious period when the conflict shall be over,—when Christ shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power,—when he shall have given his people the victory over the last enemy, even death and the grave,—and when, after judging the world in righteousness, he shall enter heaven in glorious triumph, with the countless multitude of his redeemed people, and put them in possession of the promised inheritance, the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

XLVIII.

MIRIAM AND AARON SPEAK AGAINST MOSES.

NUMBERS XII. 1-10.

THE time at which the events here recorded took place was during the second encampment of the congregation of Israel, after their departure from the wilderness of Sinai. Of their first encampment, at the end of three days' journey, we have an account in the preceding chapter, where we are told that the people broke out into murmuring so unreasonable, and, it would appear, so unexpected on the part of Moses, that from a state of high hope and strong confidence he became depressed almost to despondency. Under this trial God dealt very graciously by him. To relieve him in some measure of the burden under which he felt himself ready at times to sink, the Lord set apart seventy men of the elders of Israel, and put upon them the Spirit which was upon Moses, that they might be qualified to bear the burden of the people with him, that he might not bear it himself alone. God was pleased at the same time to satisfy the demands of the people, unreasonable as these were, by giving them flesh to eat,—though he did not permit their rebellion to pass unpunished, inasmuch as he “smote the people with a very great plague,” so that in commemoration of it the place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, or “the graves of lust,” “because there they buried the people that lusted.”

To Moses, who never failed to cherish an affectionate concern for the best interests of the people, and was so frequently per-

mitted to offer up on their behalf prayers for pardon unexampled alike in urgency and boldness, the judgment which then overtook Israel must have been a very painful affliction, and the more so that he had himself betrayed on the occasion a degree of doubt or unbelief as unbecoming as it was unusual with him. But with the very solemn and salutary warning which that judgment must have conveyed to the people,—and with the new testimony which was borne to the divine authority of the commission which Moses held, as well as the great relief that was provided for him by the appointment of the seventy elders to bear with him the burden of the people,—he could not fail to be greatly encouraged and strengthened, and might be looking forward to a long period of exemption from any such trial as he had just gone through. But if so, how short-lived his hope ! At the very next encampment of the host of Israel, a new trial awaited him, in some respects, perhaps, more painful, and, from the quarter in which it originated, not less unexpected than the former. “The people,” we are told, “journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth, and abode at Hazeroth. And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married : for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses ? hath he not spoken also by us ?”

Of this strange, and, at first sight, unaccountable conduct on the part of Miriam and Aaron, no account or explanation is to be found in Scripture beyond what is stated in these two verses. The immediate ground assigned for their speaking against Moses, and, in fact, calling in question his divine commission for doing what he had done, is declared to be his having married an Ethiopian woman. The word rendered Ethiopian, is in the original Cushite, and is applicable to a Midianite or Arabian ; and there can be no doubt that the person referred to was Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, whom Moses had married long before he went down into Egypt to bring up the children of Israel thence, but who had been left behind him on that occasion, and had come to him along with her father, after he had pitched in the wilderness of Sinai. In all probability, Miriam and Aaron might not know till then that

their brother Moses was married. But be that as it may, it still appears a very strange thing that this marriage should be made the ground of so grave a charge against Moses,—a charge which went to dispute his divine commission, except in so far as it was confirmed and sanctioned by Miriam and Aaron. Zipporah, indeed, was not an Israelite, and that circumstance, it might have been alleged, rendered it inconsistent with the dignity and privileges of Moses as a descendant of Abraham to form such a connection. But this ground of accusation had been removed by the highest authority; for it was after the connection had been formed that God appeared to Moses, and gave him a commission to go down into Egypt and bring up the people of Israel from the house of bondage. And even supposing it had been so, it would still remain a question, to which, at first sight, it may appear difficult to reply, why the charge was not brought against Moses sooner, even at the moment when Jethro brought to him Zipporah his wife and his two sons into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God.

There is nothing expressly said in Scripture in the way of explaining how it was that Miriam and Aaron brought such an accusation against Moses at all, or why they did so at the particular time referred to in the passage under consideration, rather than at an earlier period, when it would have been more natural and more seasonable to have brought it. And yet, in the absence of any such explanation, there is enough in the statement before us, brief as it is, when viewed in connection with the facts recorded in the preceding chapter, to account for the conduct of Miriam and Aaron had they been placed in ordinary circumstances. Their language betrays a feeling of jealousy, if not of envy, which, however lamentable in itself, and however humbling to human nature in its best estate, may be conceived to arise in the mind even of those who are under the influence of religious principle, and who are in the main actuated by reverence for the authority and regard for the glory of God.

But we find it difficult to conceive how such feelings could be awakened, far less harboured, in the minds of Miriam and Aaron, in the circumstances in which they were placed. They were surrounded with visible manifestations of God's presence,—they were familiar every day with the most stupendous displays of

his power,—they had witnessed manifold proofs of the divine commission with which their brother Moses had been invested,—and every suspicion that had been cast upon his authority was visited with an immediate expression of God's holy displeasure. If we could conceive ourselves to have been placed in such circumstances, we should feel, I believe, as if it would have been impossible for us to entertain, far less to express such feelings as we find Miriam and Aaron here expressing. But in so judging, it will be found, I suspect, that we are attaching an undue weight to the influence of mere miracles, as if they could never fail to command the faith and the submission of all who witnessed them. Every one, I believe, who has reflected at all, must be conscious of a tendency thus to regard those immediate and miraculous interpositions of God's power, and those manifestations of his presence of which we read in the Scriptures. But the history of the people of Israel has proved beyond all dispute, that miracles possess in themselves no such moral influence as we would thus ascribe to them,—that whatever astonishment or dread they may awaken, they do not necessarily affect the heart or purify the moral principles of our nature,—and that though men are familiar with them every day,—though they are living amidst an unceasing display of the divine presence and agency, they may all the while be giving way to the feelings, and cherishing towards one another the sentiments, which in ordinary circumstances might be awakened by the relative situations which they occupy as members of the same community.

It is unnecessary to multiply proofs of the truth of this remark. It is verified in every page of the history of the children of Israel. And bearing this truth in mind, the explanation which has been suggested of the melancholy fact recorded in the passage under consideration will appear a very natural one. It has been supposed that the conduct of Miriam originated in her jealousy of Zipporah, who would naturally occupy a very prominent place in the estimation of the congregation of Israel, as the wife of Moses, and might thus be regarded by Miriam as a rival. That Miriam had been, and no doubt still was, held in great honour by the Israelites, is plainly taught in Scripture; for we are told that when the people had passed the Red Sea, and celebrated in a song of praise the mighty deliverance which

had been wrought for them, "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." And honourable mention is made of her by the prophet Micah, when, speaking to Israel in the name of God, he said, "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam."

But if she could be guilty of the great and aggravated sin of speaking against Moses, there is nothing inconsistent with the high character which she bore as a prophetess in Israel, in supposing that this sin originated in her jealousy of another, whom she regarded as a rival; for it is not the only instance to be found in Scripture, even among the people of God, of the heart being lifted up with pride, when it ought to have been filled only with humility and gratitude. And when we recollect with what facility Aaron was drawn into the sin of making the golden calf, we cannot wonder if Miriam contrived to engage him in her quarrel, especially as she might take occasion to represent him as having been overlooked or neglected in not being consulted as to the selection of the seventy elders who were appointed to bear the burden of the people with Moses. And having given way to this spirit, they had no difficulty in finding a plausible ground for their complaint. Miriam, as we have seen, had been recognised as a prophetess in Israel; and of Aaron, God had said to Moses, "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?... Thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth.... He shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." The honour that had thus been put upon them was accordingly urged in justification of their complaint: "They said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?"

The conduct of Miriam and Aaron, on the occasion here referred to, is full of very solemn warning and instruction. The feeling by which they were actuated is no uncommon one. It is, in fact, the source of no small portion of the dissensions and ani-

mosities which prevail in the world; for selfishness is the characteristic of fallen man, and until it be counteracted by the grace of God, the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, it will manifest itself in jealousies, envyings, and ungodly rivalry,—rendering the man who surrenders himself to its influence as unhappy as he is unjust,—because it disqualifies him for enjoying what he really possesses, whether of wealth or honour, so long as he cannot attain to what is possessed by another. The sentiment of Haman is a sentiment natural to unregenerate man, ready to be called forth when occasion offers: “All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

But we are reminded, by the passage we are considering, that the same principle of selfishness may manifest itself, and that, too, in a very offensive form, even in those who have been brought under the sanctifying power of the Spirit of God. And the same humbling truth is elsewhere frequently inculcated in Scripture. Even among our Lord’s disciples there was a strife which of them should be accounted the greatest; and once and again he had occasion to rebuke this ambitious spirit,—even so late as the night on which he was betrayed into the hands of sinners. And in the writings of the apostles there are few subjects on which Christians are more frequently and affectionately warned, than on the danger of giving way to the spirit to which we now refer. That spirit is everywhere represented as standing directly opposed to the spirit of Christ; and yet the frequency with which Christians are warned against it does most emphatically intimate how much they are in danger of giving way to it,—and how careful they need to be, lest in any instance, or to any degree, they should yield to it. “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” “Let us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” “Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you,

which was also in Christ Jesus : who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

These are some of the precepts and admonitions which are to be found in Scripture, inculcating humility, and condemning pride and vain-glory ; and while they do very solemnly warn Christians of the danger of cherishing a proud and envious spirit, as that to which all men are prone, they cannot, I think, be read and seriously pondered without conveying reproof to many, perhaps the most of Christians. Such admonitions as that which charges them in lowliness of mind to esteem other better than themselves, can hardly fail, if seriously considered, to remind them of occasions on which they have given way to feelings of irritation in seeing others preferred to them,—and have not only felt wounded and hurt by the supposed neglect, but have yielded to something like anger and resentment against those who, peradventure, were the innocent cause of their mortification. Perhaps they may be disposed to consider such instances of pride and selfishness as only manifestations of a becoming regard for what was due to them from their fellow-men ; or if they allowed their feelings to go farther than was befitting, they may, perhaps, allege that their sin, if it was a sin, was but a venial one,—an infirmity of temper, about which they need not be very much disturbed.

And so, I doubt not, Miriam might reason. When the feeling of jealousy was first awakened in her mind, she might not only think it natural and lawful, but entertain it as right and befitting,—a feeling which it became her to cherish in respect of the place which she occupied as a person of influence and consideration in the congregation of Israel. But whither did that feeling carry her ? It brought her at last to such a state of daring hardihood as to call in question the divine authority of Moses, and at a time, too, when her charge, especially as supported by Aaron, was fitted to involve the camp of Israel in one universal revolt. Such a revolt or rebellion had a short time before been prevented, or rather suppressed, only by an immediate interposition, first, of the divine bounty, and then of the

divine judgments. And this was the moment at which Miriam chose to prefer a charge against Moses, which was calculated to lower his character, to detract from his influence, and to bring his authority into contempt in the eyes of the people ; and thus, a feeling which had, perhaps, long manifested itself in such petty jealousies as are but too common in the ordinary intercourse of life, broke forth at last in presumptuous sin,—the sin of placing her personal honour and interests in competition with the glory of God and the interests of his Church.

Few, perhaps, may have an opportunity of actually sinning after the similitude of Miriam's transgression. But there are none who may not be cherishing feelings which, if indulged, might carry them as far, if occasion offered. Her example, therefore, affords a solemn warning, rendered still more solemn by her punishment. It is plainly intimated that Moses heard the charge in silence, without murmuring and without resentment. But it is very significantly and impressively said, that "the Lord heard it," and "spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation,"—language which does very emphatically intimate God's righteous displeasure. And so it is more explicitly stated in the following verses ; for after rebuking Miriam and Aaron for their sin, we are told that "the anger of the Lord was kindled against them ; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle ; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow." It was a feeling of jealousy for her own honour and reputation in the sight of the people that drew her into sin ; and her punishment was suited to her offence. She was humbled in the sight of all Israel by being smitten with the most loathsome of all diseases,—the disease which God had selected as the most significant type of sin ; and notwithstanding the intercession of Moses, she was "shut out from the camp seven days : and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again."

But while this passage presents us with a very melancholy example of the extent to which even the people of God, and these, too, the most highly favoured, may be drawn into sin through the prevalence of pride and vain-glory, it brings before us also an example of the extent to which believers may, by the

grace of God, be enabled to manifest the opposite virtues of humility, self-denial, and lowliness of mind. When Miriam and Aaron said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" it is immediately added, "And the Lord heard it;" an expression from which we would naturally infer that Moses was silent under the unmerited charge,—though it must have been peculiarly bitter to him, as coming from those to whom he stood so nearly related. But the next verse removes all doubt as to the manner in which he received the murmurings of those from whom he might have looked for co-operation and encouragement; for it is there said, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."

Some critics have found a difficulty about this verse, on the ground that Moses could not be supposed to speak in this way of himself. I confess I cannot understand how there should be any difficulty about the matter, with those at least who believe the plain and simple statement of the apostle, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Under this inspiration Moses spoke and wrote; and I will venture to add, that he never was in a more humble and subdued frame of spirit than at the moment that he recorded these words. After the temporary distrust or unbelief, to which, a short time before, he had for a season given way, the testimony here borne to his character by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, must have filled him with the deepest humility and self-abasement; and they who have experienced most largely the grace and forbearance of God will be the best able to understand how Moses must have felt in the circumstances here related. Indeed, one of the chief objects of recording the singular transactions narrated in these verses seems to have been to declare, and to preserve on record, the divine testimony to the high place which Moses occupied, as bearing a divine commission, and to the fidelity with which he had discharged the trust committed to him, so as to be an eminent type of Christ, whose servant or vicegerent he was. From the moment, indeed, at which he received his commission, or rather from the moment of his birth, he typically represented the Saviour. In his infancy, he was saved from the death to which the male children of Israel were consigned by

Pharaoh, as Christ was from the bloody decree of Herod. His divine mission, like that of the Saviour, was attested by signs and miracles. "The magicians of Egypt," as an able writer has observed, "were compelled to acknowledge his superiority. He controlled the swelling of the sea, which retired at his command. He fed the people with bread in the wilderness, and brought water for them out of the rock. God talked with him face to face, and the words which he heard, he reported to the people. He appointed seventy elders, endued with a portion of his own spirit, as Christ appointed seventy disciples to proclaim the good news of the kingdom; and he sent twelve men to spy out the land of promise, as the Lord appointed twelve apostles to go into and search out every land. He was the deliverer or redeemer of the people from Egyptian bondage, as Christ is the Redeemer of his people from the bondage of sin and Satan. He was the lawgiver and judge of Israel, as Christ is the King and will be the Judge of his Church. He fasted forty days in the wilderness of Sinai when he received the law, as the Saviour fasted forty days before entering on his public ministry. And when he came down from the mount, his face shone with the reflected glory of God,—an emblem of the brighter display of that glory, as seen in the face of Jesus Christ."

These are some of the many points of resemblance between Moses as the type, and Christ as the Antitype; and without doubt they fully justify what has been well said, "Let us search all the records of universal history, and see if we can find a man who was so like to Moses as Christ, or so like to Christ as Moses. If we cannot find such an one, then we have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God." But there was, perhaps, no period in the history of Moses, and no manifestation of his character, in which his resemblance to Christ was more clearly exhibited than in the passage before us. I do not allude merely to the emphatic declaration in which he was distinguished from all other prophets, when the Lord said of him, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth; even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold."

In this he was assuredly a very eminent type of Christ, being

invested with delegated authority to act as Christ's servant in his house. And to this the apostle expressly refers, for the purpose of showing that Christ was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as though Moses verily "was faithful in all his house," it was still but as a servant, while Christ was "a Son over his own house,"—an argument which plainly implies the high honour which had been put upon Moses, as typically representing Christ. But when I say that at no time, and in no circumstances, perhaps, did Moses more nearly resemble Christ than on the occasion referred to in the passage under consideration, I refer especially to the statement respecting him, that "he was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,"—and to the practical exemplification which he was giving of his meekness at the moment. He could say, in reference to the conduct of Miriam and Aaron, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." But, "when he was reviled, he reviled not again : when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." It was in this, more than in all the mighty deeds which God wrought by his hand, that the true greatness and glory of the character of Moses appeared ; for it was in this that he reflected the image of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. And it is in this, moreover, that the humblest believer may seek and hope to resemble Moses. In so far as he was endowed with special gifts, and invested with a divine commission for the accomplishment of the great work to which he was called, and in the fulfilment of which he was a type of Christ, believers now can neither imitate nor resemble him. But the true excellence of his character was manifested in a manner in which every Christian may every day have an opportunity of imitating him ; for there is no relation in life, and few transactions between man and man, in which we may not have occasion to exercise the meekness and manifest the humility of Moses. And while his conduct on the occasion before us furnishes an example for our daily imitation, so the result of the transaction here recorded abounds with encouragement, as affording one among many proofs, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

XLIX.

THE ROD OF AARON BUDDING.

NUMBERS XVII. 5.

THE occasion of the miracle foretold in the passage we are about to consider, and afterwards fulfilled, arose out of events recorded in the preceding chapter. There we read of one of the most formidable insurrections of the people of Israel against Moses and Aaron which had till then occurred ; though not more so, perhaps, than might have been expected after what we had been previously told of them. It will be recollected that, at the time here referred to, the Israelites were on their journey back again into the wilderness, after having arrived at the borders of Canaan, on the possession of which they might have immediately entered, but for their unbelief and faint-heartedness. Such, however, was their faithless fear and distrust of God, that they expressed a wish that they had died in the wilderness rather than encounter the armies of the Canaanites. "Would God," said they, "we had died in this wilderness!" Their profane, and, as it afterwards appeared, insincere prayer was granted. Moses was commanded to say unto them, "As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you : your carcases shall fall in this wilderness. . . . But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms,

until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness. . . . I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me : in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die." Therefore said the Lord unto them, "As for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea." It soon appeared, on their receiving this solemn determination of God, that they little knew what they were imprecating on themselves when they said, "Would God we had died in this wilderness!" for, like wayward and passionate children, they insisted on going up to take possession of the land, and in spite of the assurance which Moses gave them that it was vain,—that it was as much an act of rebellion against God then to attempt it, as it had formerly been to refuse doing so,—they went presumptuously up into the hill, till convinced of their folly by being smitten before the Amorites. Then they returned and wept before the Lord : but the Lord would not hearken unto their voice, nor give ear unto them. So they turned, and took their journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea, as the Lord had spoken unto Moses.

But though they were thus for the time so tamed and subdued in spirit,—so conscious of their own helplessness,—and so impressed with a sense of God's mighty power as without resistance to turn their back on Canaan, and commence their journey into the wilderness which they had already passed, and in which they were solemnly assured they should die ; yet the whole of their preceding history would prepare us to expect, that they would again manifest the same spirit of discontentment and rebellion by which they had so frequently provoked the Lord to anger. Ungodly men, in a season of danger, or under the pressure of heavy affliction, may for a time feel and manifest such a dread at least, if not a filial fear of God, as may render them apparently submissive to his will, and ready to abandon their former iniquities ; but on the gradual removal of the calamity which depressed them, they may return again to their presumptuous and high-handed sinning. And so we might expect it would be with those of the people of Israel who were not truly humbled under the mighty hand of God, and had not returned by penitence and faith,—not only subdued at the moment, but

renewed in the spirit of their minds, and led to look beyond Canaan, for "a better country, that is an heavenly."

In regard to those who had not undergone this great change, they might have been expected to be more forward than ever to complain of their privations, and to question the rectitude of that ordination whereby they were doomed to a life of such hopeless toil and hardship. Formerly they had some prospect of a termination to their toilsome pilgrimage; for though at times they spoke as if they had no expectation of finding Canaan what it had been represented to be, and even impiously declared their conviction that they had been duped and deceived in being persuaded to leave Egypt, it is plain, I think, that there was a good deal in all this of mere unreasonable and unmeaning querulousness with their condition at the moment, just as men are still found to be fretful and impatient, without knowing very well why, though in being so they are charging God foolishly. They could not, in their calmer and more reasonable mood of mind, be altogether without some hope that their journeying in the wilderness was to have an end, and that there awaited them something better, at least, than what they had experienced during their passage through a waste howling wilderness. But from the time to which I have been referring, none of them, from twenty years old and upwards, could have any such hope. The sentence had gone forth,—“In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.” Unless, therefore, they were reconciled to this sentence by the hope of a better country, even an heavenly, their prospect must have been a very dreary one,—the prospect of wearing out the remainder of their days amidst the privations and sore travail of the desert, absolutely excluded from Canaan, and unable even to return into Egypt. If, in the short period of little more than a year, they had frequently become so impatient as openly to arraign the wisdom and impeach the veracity of God, what was to be expected of them after they heard the irrevocable judgment which God had pronounced, but that they would surrender themselves to all the recklessness of despair, and that they would be ready to say, as their children did at a later period,—“There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.”

Such, we might naturally expect, would have been the effect of the solemn communication which Moses was commanded to make to the people of Israel ; and if it was not so,—if they did not break out into one universal revolt,—it must have been either that they had been subdued into true penitence and resignation, or that they were awed and restrained by that holy, wise, and powerful, though unseen control which God exercises over all his creatures, and by which he maketh even the wrath of man to praise him. But though a general rebellion against the divine appointment was thus prevented, by the conversion of some, perhaps, and by the restraining power of God operating upon others, yet there did break out an insurrection, which, though only partial, was more formidable in respect to Moses, and more daringly impious in regard to God, than any, perhaps, with which Israel had hitherto been chargeable. “Korah,” we are told, “the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”

Any thing like a revolt among the people, subsequently to the time of which we have been speaking, could not fail to be alarming to Moses. It must have been to him a very trying moment when he announced to the congregation of Israel the solemn message with which God had charged him, “Turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea; for in this wilderness ye shall be consumed, and there ye shall die:” for, knowing as he did the temper and disposition of the people, he might have anticipated a more determined opposition to the divine commandment than any that he had yet witnessed. When Korah, therefore, and his company presented themselves before him in the attitude of bold defiance, and professedly speaking on behalf of the whole congregation of Israel, he might naturally conclude that the people generally, those against whom the sen-

tence had gone forth, had determined, in open despite of the divine authority, either presumptuously to attempt taking possession of Canaan, or to carry into effect their infatuated purpose of returning into Egypt. And in either case he could foresee nothing but the execution of the fearful judgment which had already more than once been threatened, but which, in answer to his prayers, had been averted: "Let me alone, that I may consume them in a moment. . . . I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation, and mightier than they."

Nor was it merely from the circumstances in which it took place, that Korah's rebellion must have been peculiarly trying and formidable to Moses. It was not merely a murmuring because of some new privation to which the people had been subjected, and which, like former murmurings, might have been silenced by some new manifestation of the divine bounty, or, at all events, by a seasonable and merciful chastisement. It was a combination of "two hundred and fifty of the princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown," for the avowed purpose of wresting his delegated authority from Moses, and the priesthood from Aaron.

And while it was thus a more formidable rebellion than any which Moses had till then encountered, so the object of it was peculiarly presumptuous and offensive in the sight of God. It was not only calling in question the authority of Moses as invested with a divine commission to rule and to direct Israel; that was implied in all the murmurings of the people. But the guilt of Korah and his company consisted mainly in their disputing the priesthood of Aaron, and presumptuously daring to come near to God in another way than that by which alone he had declared that he could be approached with acceptance. The apostle says generally of the murmurings and disobedience of Israel in the wilderness, that they tempted Christ. And it is obvious that this was especially true of Korah and his company. It was in the person and office of Aaron that Christ was typified with a clearness, and set forth with a fulness, which we find in no other institution of the Old Testament. Aaron alone was the medium through whom, as their representative, the people of Israel had access with acceptance into the very presence of God.

To this great truth God had borne testimony, when, at the rearing up of the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle; and this ordinance he vindicated in a very awful manner, when two of the sons of Aaron himself were smitten dead, because they "offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not." On nothing, indeed, did God more frequently and emphatically express his jealousy than on the subject of that method which he had revealed for the admission of sinners into his presence; and nothing, therefore, could be more offensive in his sight than the presumption of Korah in disputing the priesthood of Aaron, and thereby dishonouring the mediatorial work of Christ as the great High Priest of his Church.

The guilt of Korah's rebellion was very clearly apprehended by Moses, who manifested a special anxiety for the vindication of Aaron's priesthood. Formidable as was the conspiracy, he betrayed no fear or anxiety about himself; but, strong in the faith that God would maintain the honour of his own institution, he boldly challenged Korah and his company to put their pretensions to the test, by appealing to God, and leaving to Him to determine between them and Aaron. "He spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to-morrow the Lord will show who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord to-morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi. . . . Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? . . . and seek ye the priesthood also? For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" Korah and his followers had the hardihood to accept this challenge. "They took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the

congregation with Moses and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them," that is, against Moses and Aaron, "unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?"

As on former occasions, the prayer of Moses and Aaron prevailed to avert the threatened judgment of God from the people at large. But the sin of Korah was not to pass without a befitting expression of God's displeasure,—and such an expression as would leave every man without excuse who did not see and recognise in it the immediate hand of God. Accordingly, Moses was commanded to say in the hearing of the people, "Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord." And so it came to pass: and while the earth opened and swallowed up those who had abetted Korah's rebellion, "there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense;" thus making a marked distinction between the rebels generally, and those who had personally ventured to offer strange fire before the Lord, presuming to come into God's presence, and expecting or claiming to find acceptance there in a different way and on a different ground from that which alone God had appointed. And to show still more fully the peculiar guilt of those who had thus profanely approached God, the Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the Lord, therefore they

are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel."

For the time, of course, this judgment had the effect of checking the rebellion. The people of Israel that were round about the tents of those who were destroyed were struck with terror; and they "fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also." But there was, with many at least, no intelligent perception of the daring sin into which they had been drawn, and, consequently, no real repentance. So deeply and so extensively had the people been involved in the conspiracy of Korah, that, on the following day, we are told, when their mere terror had been somewhat allayed, that the congregation generally "murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." Again God appeared in his glory, ready to execute his righteous judgment, saying unto Moses, "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment." Then it was that they were made practically to know the value of Aaron's priesthood,—the necessity of a mediator between them and God. Wrath had gone out from the Lord: the plague had begun. Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them." "And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation, . . . and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed."

But though the sudden destruction of fourteen thousand seven hundred of their number by the plague, besides those that died in consequence of being more immediately implicated in the matter of Korah, might have been supposed sufficient to convince the surviving congregation of Israel of the guilt and danger of approaching God in any other way than that which he had appointed, he was pleased, in great kindness and condescension, to give them a further intimation of his will on the subject, and in a way calculated to impress them with a deep sense of his goodness. To remove all doubt as to his mind and will regarding the exclusive priesthood of Aaron, and to prevent the people from being again drawn into such a presumptuous sin as that of

Korah, from which they had suffered so severely, he was graciously pleased to command Moses, saying, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you." The people of Israel were without excuse, if they doubted whether God had chosen Aaron to come near to him to make atonement and offer incense on their behalf, independently of this new proof which God condescended to give them of his mind and will on that subject.

But it was a subject the most deeply interesting to them as well as to the Church in all future times,—the subject that does most nearly concern men as sinners, being nothing less than the solution of the momentous question, How may the guilty draw near to God, and find acceptance with him? He was, therefore, graciously pleased to give the people of Israel such a clear and explicit declaration of his mind on this most important of all points, as nothing but the most perverse and wilful blindness could misunderstand; and he has recorded it for the instruction and encouragement of the Church in all after times. "Moses," we are told, "laid up the rods" of the princes of Israel "before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not." This last expression does very emphatically intimate the gracious design of the miracle, as intended to warn Israel against the inevitable ruin that would overtake them if they continued to reject the only way in which they could draw near

to God, and presumptuously to reckon on any other. And the effect of this condescension, in vouchsafing to them such a plain and intelligible proof of Aaron's exclusive priesthood, appears to have been to impress the people of Israel with a deeper sense of their guiltiness in having abetted the rebellion of Korah, than even the terrible judgments which they had witnessed. For they "spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die : shall we be consumed with dying?"

The history which we have thus shortly reviewed naturally directs our thoughts to Christ, and to his office as the great High Priest of his Church ; for it was in his being a type of Christ, that the glory, and the sacredness, and the efficacy of Aaron's priesthood consisted. The nature of the miracle, too, which God was pleased to employ, in testimony of his having chosen Aaron to make atonement and intercession for the people, and, when occasion required, to stand between the dead and the living, does also bring Christ before us, inasmuch as Aaron's rod that budded was itself a type of Christ, as we find him elsewhere predicted and represented in Scripture. Thus, the prophet Isaiah, in the eleventh chapter of his prophecies, foretold Christ under the figure employed in the passage before us : "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots : and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." In like manner, in the fifty-third chapter it is said of him, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground : he hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." And the prophet Zechariah has repeatedly prophesied of Christ under the title of the Branch, and that too in close connection with his office as Priest : "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH ; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord : even he shall build the temple of the Lord ; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne ; and he shall be a priest upon his throne."

And if the miracle in the passage we are considering does thus

lead us directly to Christ,—to the efficacy and fruits of his unchangeable priesthood, and to the free access which believers have into the presence of God through his mediation,—the events with which the miracle stands connected still convey to men the same solemn warning which they did to Israel of old. Aaron's rod that budded was laid up before the Lord, even in the ark of the covenant, by the tables of the testimony, as the apostle tells us ; and while it was a standing pledge to the people of God of their acceptance with him, when they drew near in the exercise of penitence and faith, and in the appointed way, it was also designed, as the context informs us, to be for a token against the rebels,—a permanent memorial of the fate of Korah and his company, that none might presume to approach God otherwise than through the mediation which he had ordained, the man whom he had chosen to make atonement and offer incense on behalf of the guilty. And the warning is not less needful now than it was then. Men are still as prone as ever they were to presume on finding favour and forgiveness with God, on some other ground than the one great atonement of Christ. Even when awakened to a sense of sin, and when the consciousness of guilt depresses their soul, they will often remain long in a state of darkness and discomfort, simply because they are seeking to bring some sacrifice or some incense of their own, if not to put in the place of Christ's sacrifice and intercession, at least to present along with these, as necessary to give them confidence in relying on the Saviour's merits. And the history of the Christian Church bears melancholy evidence that many, under such convictions and fears, have betaken themselves to refuges of lies, seeking to find rest for their souls in the laborious services of the body,—looking to some inherent righteousness in themselves, instead of the imputed righteousness of Christ, as the ground of hope towards God,—and thus making the cross of Christ of none effect.

And then, what vast multitudes are there who have never felt any anxiety on the subject, but who take for granted that they have nothing to fear, so long as there is nothing in their character more flagrantly sinful than in that of their neighbours around them ! Such persons have never felt it to be a solemn thing to approach and address God. They have never been conscious of any thing like fear or holy awe at the thought of coming

into the Divine Presence, placing themselves under the inspection of His pure and all-seeing eye, and professedly offering him the homage of their hearts,—every thought, and desire, and affection of which is perfectly known to him. They may often place themselves in the attitude of devotion ; but it is altogether an outward act, in the performance of which their mind is at ease,—a stranger alike to lively hope or disturbing anxiety. They have no apprehension of the nature of sin, or of the extent of their own sinfulness, as it appears in the sight of God. They do not, therefore, really feel their need of a Saviour, a Mediator between them and God, an High Priest to make an atonement and intercession on their behalf. They may be familiar with the name of the Saviour,—that name may be in their mouth when they approach God,—and they may in words professedly ask blessings for his sake. But did they examine themselves so as to discover the real state of their hearts, they would find that they are not conscious of their absolute dependence on him,—that they do not see themselves to be guilty, and therefore condemned, so that they could not venture to address God, if they had not the righteousness of Christ to rest upon and to plead in his sight,—and that if a sense of sin has at any time awakened a painful fear or misgiving in their mind, it is not on the atonement and intercession of Christ, but on the general mercy of God, in connection with some repentance and reformation on their part, that they mainly rely for escaping the punishment which they dread. This proneness to rely on the uncovenanted mercy of God,—this hope of finding pardon and acceptance in some other way than that which he has appointed, has been, I fear, in all ages, the undoing of multitudes ; and it is against the guilt and danger of the self-righteousness which it involves that the Scriptures do everywhere and most solemnly testify. This is the great practical lesson which is taught by the history of Korah, and which is illustrated by the general tenor of the Bible ; for while God is there revealed as a gracious God, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, it is not less clearly taught that this forgiveness can be extended to sinners only in one way,—that there is no name given under heaven among men, whereby they can be saved, but the name of Jesus,—and that out of Christ God is a consuming fire.

L.

THE DEATH OF AARON.

NUMBERS XX. 29.

THERE were many circumstances connected with the death of Aaron which must have rendered it a very solemn and memorable event to the people of Israel, besides being in itself, as it still is, full of instruction. He had no concern in that rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, in consequence of which all the Israelites, from twenty years old and upward, were doomed to die in the wilderness without seeing the land of Canaan; and when the sentence, therefore, was pronounced against them, "In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die," we might naturally have concluded that Aaron and Moses, though not expressly mentioned, as Joshua and Caleb were, did not fall under that sentence, and would, of course, be permitted to enter the promised inheritance. And so they no doubt would, for any thing that had at that time taken place. Yet we cannot help regarding the omission of their names on that occasion, when the promise of entering into Canaan was expressly confined to Joshua and Caleb, as something like an intimation of what God foresaw was to happen, as recorded in the preceding verses of this chapter. And when the events there related did take place,—when Moses and Aaron were themselves excluded from Canaan,—the devout and reflecting Israelites, who could remember what had taken place eight and thirty years before, must have been very solemnly impressed with the explanation thus afforded of

the fact, that when God sentenced the whole congregation of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, to die in the wilderness, exemption from that sentence was strictly limited to Joshua and Caleb. Aaron and Moses were not, indeed, included in that sentence; for they were not involved in the rebellion that called it forth. But neither could they be included in the promise given to Joshua and Caleb; for by Him who sees the end from the beginning, the time was foreknown when He was to say to them also, "Ye shall not enter into the land which I have given to the children of Israel."

The reason of this severe sentence against the two individuals who, of the whole congregation of the children of Israel, might have been expected to enter into Canaan, is recorded in the chapter before us. "Then came the children of Israel," we are told, "even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin, in the first month,"—that is, as appears from a subsequent chapter, the first month of the fortieth year after their departure from the land of Egypt, and within a few months, therefore, of the termination of their wanderings; "and Miriam died there, and was buried there,"—being soon after followed by her brothers Aaron and Moses. We are further told that there was no water for the congregation; and notwithstanding all that they had seen of the bitter consequences of the rebellion of their fathers, on account of which they themselves had been doomed to wander forty years in the wilderness, they gave way to murmuring, and they expressed themselves in language so like that of their fathers, that one might almost suppose they had taken pains to imitate them. They "chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."

God did not take them at their word when they foolishly, and impiously, and insincerely wished that they had died with their brethren whose carcasses had fallen in the wilderness. He dealt with them as nothing but a divine compassion could have done.

But he rebuked them in a way that was fitted, and, I doubt not, felt by many, and these the humblest and most devout among them, to place their sin before them in a very aggravated light, by the severity which he exercised towards Aaron and Moses. When they fell on their faces before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, "the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

It has long, perhaps always, been a question with commentators, What was the sin with which Moses and Aaron were chargeable on the occasion here referred to, and on account of which there passed upon them also sentence of exclusion from the land of Canaan? It is said generally in the passage before us that they believed not God, to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel; and in the 106th Psalm, the subject is thus referred to:—The people "angered him also at the waters of strife," or Meribah, "so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." Moses and Aaron, then, were chargeable with unbelief and irritation. With regard to the latter,—I mean the anger or irritation to which they gave way,—it was the natural consequence of their unbelief, and was sufficiently manifest in the language which Moses employed, when he said, "Ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" as if it had been against them,—Moses and Aaron,—that the people had sinned, and as if their honour and authority, not God's, had been in-

sulted. But wherein consisted their unbelief, of which this unadvised language was the consequence, the natural fruit? Perhaps they doubted whether it were enough simply to speak to the rock, as they were expressly commanded to do, and whether it would not be necessary not only to smite the rock, as Moses had been instructed to do on a former occasion, but to smite it twice. And if so, then it was a distrust of God's power,—a doubt whether the rock would give forth water at the divine bidding, unaccompanied with the smiting of Moses, which formed no part of the divine commission which he had received.

And if this was the point on which Moses and Aaron were charged with unbelief, the rebuke with which it was visited was full of instruction to the Church in all subsequent times. The rock which supplied Israel with water, and which followed them in the wilderness, was one of the most significant of the many types of Christ with which the Old Testament Church was favoured. As that rock was once smitten with the rod of Moses, the lawgiver of Israel; so it behoved Christ, the Antitype of the rock, to be smitten once, but only once, with the rod of the great Lawgiver, that he might vindicate the law, yea, magnify and make it honourable. When Moses, therefore, smote the rock again, and twice too, not only without authority, but in opposition to the divine command,—for he was commanded to speak to the rock,—he marred the beauty of that significant type, whereby the perfection of Christ's one sacrifice was so clearly set forth; and the rebuke, therefore, which he and Aaron thereby incurred does most emphatically condemn the presumption of those who would add to Christ's one efficacious offering of himself, either by works of self-righteousness, or by the frequent offering of what they call his body and blood in the idolatrous sacrifice of the Mass. The divine influence which Christ, by his Spirit, imparts to his Church may, for the chastisement of the Church, appear for a season to be dried up,—as the rock in the wilderness did for a time withhold its water from the thirsting Israelites. But Christ needs not to be smitten again, either in reality or in figure, to give forth to his people the water of life. He has only to be spoken to in the prayer of faith, founded on the warrant of God's Word; and whether such prayer proceed from the humble individual believer in his humble cottage, or whether it be offered

up as the united supplication of his Church in her collective capacity, it will not fail to draw down in rich abundance those communications of his grace, even the quickening influences of his Spirit, whereby he refreshes his heritage when it is weary.

This is a precious truth, and I think it is the truth which the passage before us was designed to inculcate, especially for the instruction of the New Testament Church. By the Israelites, of course, it could be but partially apprehended ; and if there be still some difficulty, as most commentators admit that there is, in determining what the sin was with which Aaron and Moses were chargeable on the occasion here referred to, it must have been equally or still more difficult for the people of Israel to discover the full extent of that sin. But that difficulty could serve only to impress them the more solemnly with the severity wherewith the sin of Moses and Aaron was visited, as contrasted with the forbearance and long-suffering which they themselves had experienced. Whatever might be the precise nature of that sin, there was nothing in it of that outward flagrant rebellion with which the congregation had been chargeable. At the end of forty years' experience of the wonderful works of God, in the way both of judgment and of mercy, they had, under a temporary privation of water, given utterance to as daring rebellion against God's authority and impeachment of his truth as their fathers had done at the beginning of that period. Yet God not only spared them, but, in spite of their ingratitude, again brought water for them out of the rock. During the same long period, Moses had been compelled to bear with the unreasonable complaints of them and their fathers ; and when, at the end of that time, he heard himself assailed with the same charge which had been brought against him at the first, they could not be surprised if he gave way to momentary irritation, and spoke unadvisedly with his lips. Yet for this, he and Aaron forfeited and lost the privilege of entering the land of Canaan. Such a manifestation of the divine rectitude and severity was fitted to make a deeper and more lasting impression upon them, than if they had seen, as on other occasions, some of the most rebellious of their own number smitten by the hand of God. Nor can we doubt, I think, that it was so sanctified to many of them ; and that while they mourned for Aaron, it would add not a little to

the bitterness of their regret to reflect that God had been angry with him for their sakes.

But there were other considerations which must have rendered the death of Aaron a very solemn and memorable event, at least to the humble and penitent of the congregation of Israel. Though, in a moment of fretfulness and impatience, they did at times chide with him, as they did with Moses, and foolishly ascribe to him the hardships to which they were exposed, and the disappointments which they experienced in the wilderness, yet, when brought to a better mind, they could not fail to look to Aaron both with veneration and gratitude.

In virtue of his office, he occupied a prominent place in all that was most solemn in the religious services of the tabernacle; and if they felt awed by the contemplation of these services as manifestations of the unspotted purity and inaccessible majesty of God, or if they derived any comfort from them as intimations of God's favour, and as tokens of his forgiveness, the thought of Aaron and his services must have been connected in their minds with the recollection of every thing that had most deeply interested and affected them. He was the only visible medium whereby they could approach God, or offer an acceptable sacrifice. He alone could carry the blood which was to make atonement for their souls into the immediate presence of Jehovah, and bring back thence the gracious assurance that their sacrifice was accepted. For nearly forty years he had executed the office of high priest, and during all that period many of them must have witnessed every year the awful solemnity of the great day of atonement. Often must they have waited in reverential awe while he entered into the holy of holies on their behalf,—and often must they have heard from his lips the gracious words with which the blessing of the Lord was promised: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

They could not but look back also with feelings both of awe and gratitude to the memorable occasion when, because of the rebellion of Korah, wrath did go out from the Lord, and the plague began to consume, till Aaron ran into the midst of the congregation, and put on incense, and stood between the dead

and the living, and the plague was stayed. Aaron, in fact, must have been associated in their minds with all that was interesting in their spiritual history and experience,—and especially with the recollection of that comfort which they had found in seasons of depression and fear, when the dread of God's judgments was ready to overwhelm them, and when, in the acceptance of their offerings, they received a new intimation of his readiness to forgive. All these things would be brought to their remembrance by the death of Aaron, and would go to embitter the reflection that if they had taken part with their brethren in the late murmuring, they were the guilty means of drawing him into that sin whereby he was excluded from Canaan, and appointed to die in the wilderness. But even if they had no such bitter reflections to dwell upon, they would feel towards Aaron at his death as they never perhaps did during his life, and would become sensible, as if for the first time, of blessings and benefits which they received through him, but the value of which they had but ill appreciated.

There are many, I doubt not, who can tell, from their own experience, what a solemn thing it is to witness the removal of a servant of God, with whose ministrations they can connect all that is most interesting in their spiritual history,—one, it may be, who was the instrument whereby the Holy Spirit wrought that mighty change which took place in their heart, when they were turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God,—one who is associated in their mind with the peace which the Gospel first spoke to their wounded conscience,—who was often employed as the medium through which God imparted to them consolation in the time of trouble,—and whose instructions were blessed to them for their direction in seasons of perplexity. From the recollections which the removal of such an individual has awakened, they may form some idea of what the pious and devout of the congregation of Israel felt on the death of Aaron.

And yet it will be but a very faint idea. Aaron did not stand to Israel in the ordinary relation of a servant of God to his Church now, interesting and important as that relation is. He was, personally, the clearest and most perfect type of Christ which the Church till that time had ever enjoyed. And a type,

be it remembered, was to the Church, while it knew nothing of the Saviour but through types, a very different thing from what it is to the Church now. To the Church even now, the types of the Old Testament are full of interest and instruction,—abundant in consolation and encouragement,—for the humblest believer who reads of or meditates upon them, sees in them an accumulation of evidence to the efficacy of that blood which has pacified his own soul, and to the infinite worth of that Atonement on which he has been enabled to rely. And I venture to say, that the most sublime views of the character and work of Christ have been conveyed to the minds of the most humble and comparatively illiterate believers, through the typical institutions and events of the Old Testament Church. The truth of this remark must be a matter of experience and observation to every one who has ever been privileged to stand by the deathbed of a true believer in humble life.

But pregnant as these types still are, and ever will be, to the Church, in consolation and instruction, they were unspeakably more so to the Church of old. They were to them more realities than types. They were the only clear and intelligible bond of connection between the Church and God. The lamb that was sacrificed was to them Christ,—for on the acceptance or rejection of that sacrifice depended the momentous question whether they were the objects of God's favour or displeasure. And of all these types, Aaron was the clearest, as well as the most significant. He was the immediate channel of communication between the people and God. On him, especially on the great day of atonement, when he went into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifice and with incense, hung all the hopes of the humble and believing of the house of Israel; and they could have no peace until he returned again from his solemn and perilous service, to tell them that God had smelled a sweet savour, and that he was authorised to bless them in the name of the Lord. We cannot conceive of the feeling which the true believers in Israel had towards Aaron, and, therefore, can form but an imperfect idea of what they must have experienced when he died,—and died because the Lord was angry with him for their sakes.

But the death of Aaron must have been a memorable event

to the believing Israelites, on another ground besides that of its recalling to them recollections of what must ever be the most interesting of all subjects to sinful men,—the way of their admission into God's presence, and the ground of the hope which they had already been permitted to cherish. That event must have been to them a mysterious one. All their peace, and comfort, and hope of God's favour, were associated, as we have already seen, with the thought of Aaron and his services as high priest, the mediator between them and God. His death was an event which, in all probability, they had never seriously contemplated,—far less his death on the declared ground that he and Moses had rebelled against the work of the Lord at the waters of Meribah. It was an event, therefore, which could not fail to awaken serious thoughts, and to suggest anxious questions.

They beheld the man with whom all their hopes of acceptance with God were associated unexpectedly cut off,—and that, too, because of a special offence,—an offence similar in kind, however different in degree, to that of the congregation at large. And on seeing this solemn event, they might naturally be led to inquire how they were then to approach God, and by whom their sacrifices were to be presented, and incense offered on their behalf. It is true, Eleazar was appointed in Aaron's room, as is very touchingly related in the preceding verses of this chapter, where we are told that Moses, by the express command of the Lord, took Aaron and Eleazar his son, "and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation: and Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount; and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount."

Provision was thus made for continuing the office of the high priest in the person of the son and successor of Aaron; and the fulness of this provision for supplying Aaron's place was very emphatically intimated, in that his holy garments, which had been made for glory and for beauty, and in which he had been accustomed to serve, were transferred to Eleazar. Still, it must at the first have been a mysterious thing to the believing Israelites, to see that they were dependent for the presentation and acceptance of their sacrifices before God on a frail and sinful fellow-creature, liable not only to death, the common lot of

all men, but to death as the immediate consequence of some special transgression. No doubt Aaron's death, together with the circumstances in which it took place, was both calculated and designed to lead away their thoughts and their confidence from the individual who held the office of the high priest, to the office itself.

The perpetuity of that office had been very strikingly intimated by the miraculous blossoming of Aaron's rod, which probably continued to blossom long after he was gathered unto his people; and it was farther confirmed by the substitution of Eleazar in his room, even before his death. The Church, therefore, was taught by Aaron's death to look forward to Him of whom Aaron was but a type, and in whom an everlasting and unchangeable priesthood was to be vested; and there might thus be, as there probably was, a great accession made to the revelation which had already been vouchsafed concerning Christ as the great High Priest of his Church. But though all this is very plain to us, and we have no difficulty in perceiving that the death of Aaron as the type was intended to direct the hopes and expectations of the Church to the great Antitype, yet the people of God who witnessed that event might be in much perplexity before they were enabled so to interpret it. The thought that they might at any moment be deprived of the high priest, and that for a season there might be none to exercise his sacred and momentous functions, was fitted to disturb and perplex them; and at no time, perhaps, were such apprehensions more likely to be felt than on the solemn occasion before us, when the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, and mourned for him, even all the house of Israel.

And it is here that the death of Aaron is full of instruction still, as presenting, in striking contrast, the superior privileges of the Church now to those of the Old Testament saints. There is no portion of the flock of Christ which may not be at any moment visited with a bereavement similar to that which Israel sustained by the death of their first high priest; for it is true of the ministers of the Gospel, as it was of the priests under the law, that they are not suffered to continue by reason of death. But painful as such bereavements may be, they need not occasion any perplexity or misgiving. They may, indeed, administer

severe reproof; for they may lead Christians to discover that they had been placing an undue reliance on the ministers of the Word, and so far putting them in the place of Christ. This, however, is a most salutary discovery for them to make, however sharp and humbling may be the rebuke which it brings with it. But it cannot occasion any such doubt or misgiving as we might suppose the death of the high priest might occasion to the Old Testament Church. The only effect which it can produce on true believers is to turn their thoughts to their great High Priest, and to fix their confidence more exclusively upon him; at the same time bringing more clearly and impressively before them the precious truth, that though he once died, he is alive, and liveth for evermore.

This is the use which the apostle makes of the contrast between the changeableness by succession of the priesthood under the law, and the unchangeableness, the perpetuity of the priesthood of Christ. "They truly," says he, "were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost," or evermore, "that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Whatever changes may take place in the Church, or among those who minister therein, and however disastrous such changes may appear to be, believers have a refuge and a resting-place amidst them all in the uninterrupted exercise of Christ's priestly office. The exercise of that office is not and cannot be for one instant suspended; so that there are no circumstances in which his people can be placed, where they may not at any moment draw near to God, with the assurance that their Advocate and Intercessor is ready to present their confessions, and supplications, and thanksgivings, with acceptance to the Father.

It was so under the Old Testament dispensation, though believers then did not so clearly see and understand it as we may now do. The priests that were designed to typify or prefigure Him were subject to death; they were liable also to become corrupt; and the time came when their sacred office was made the subject of unholy traffic. But amidst all these changes and corruptions, He watched over and cared for his

own,—the blood which he was one day to shed had even then efficacy sufficient to cleanse them from all sin,—and whether there was an high priest on earth or not, to offer sacrifice and to burn incense on their behalf, he failed not to procure for and to impart to them the grace and strength of which they stood in need.

And so it is under the new dispensation. His servants now, as formerly, are not suffered to continue by reason of death,—and they are liable to all the infirmities, and corruptions, and unfaithfulness which too often characterised his ministers of old. But the assurance that He ever liveth to make intercession for his people will at all times be a precious truth, from which they will draw abundant consolation, and never more precious than when they are deprived of the means of grace,—the ordinary channels through which he conveys divine influences to the soul. They are ever in danger of attaching more weight to these means than belongs to them, and to allow one or other of them to come between them and Christ. It may, therefore, be in great mercy and faithfulness that he deprives them for a season of privileges which had begun to usurp in their heart that place which He ought to have occupied; thus teaching them to know, by the withdrawal of these privileges, what they had been too prone to forget in the enjoyment of them, that Christ himself is the only inexhaustible fountain of spiritual life,—that it is he who immediately transacts with God for them in the heavenly sanctuary,—that he is personally their Advocate and Intercessor with the Father,—their great High Priest, who, though he has entered into the heavens, is touched with the feeling of their infirmities,—and that it is only in the direct and lively exercise of faith in him that they can come boldly unto the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

LI.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

NUMBERS XXI. 4-9.

THE remarkable event recorded in these verses could hardly fail to arrest our attention as singularly interesting, even when considered merely in reference to the people of Israel, and as a part of the discipline whereby they were prepared for entering on the possession of the promised inheritance. Every one who has perused their history, from their departure out of Egypt till the period referred to in this passage, must have observed, that their besetting sin, the origin of all their fretful impatience and daring rebellion, was their distrust of God's word, their secret suspicion that his promises would not be fulfilled, and their presumptuous assumption that his threatenings would not be executed. For nearly forty years, they and their fathers had acted on this principle,—the principle on which, I fear, multitudes still continue to act. In the course of that time, they manifested their unbelief in various and most offensive forms, virtually charging the God of truth with having dealt unjustly by them,—deceiving them with false promises, and subjecting them to unmerited and unreasonable hardships. The more flagrant of their acts of rebellion were visited with righteous judgments, though always in measure and in great mercy; and for a time they were to all appearance convinced of their folly at least, if not of their guilt, in daring to maintain a controversy with God. But with their next privation, their unbelief and impatience re-

turned ; and in the passage before us, we find them, in the fortieth year of their pilgrimage, giving way to unbelief and rebellion, just as if they had never witnessed any divine interposition either on their behalf or for their chastisement. "The people," we are told, "spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water ; and our soul loatheth this light bread."

This new and aggravated instance of unbelief and rebellion was visited with a new and a very severe judgment. "The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people ; and much people of Israel died." As usual, when the hand of God was heavy upon them, they confessed their sin, and supplicated deliverance. "When he slew them, then they sought him : and they returned and inquired early after God." They "came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee ; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people." As on all other occasions, the intercession of Moses was heard ; but his request was not granted in the way in which the people wished and expected it to be. The serpents were not taken away. They continued still to bite the people, and the wound which they inflicted was as mortal as ever. But an infallible remedy was provided for every man who would avail himself of it, and a remedy as simple and easy of application as it was certain in its efficacy. "Moses," by the divine command, "made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

It was, however, a remedy which could reach none who did not place implicit confidence in the simple word of God. No man could have conceived of any possible connection between his looking to the brazen image of a serpent ; and his being healed of the otherwise mortal wound of a real serpent ; nor was there any such connection, till it was established by the immediate exercise of divine power. And herein God manifested the grace and wisdom of his dealings with Israel, in subjecting them to a discipline especially fitted to convince them of their guilt as well as their folly in distrusting his word,—that sin to which

they were so prone, and into which they continued to fall, notwithstanding all that God had done to command their confidence. They were made to feel that there was nothing between them and death, but a remedy which, to their apprehension, must have been altogether inadequate,—nay, which their reason would have pronounced devoid of any efficacy,—and that if they did entertain any hope of relief, that hope could have no foundation but the simple promise of God.

How long they were subjected to this discipline we are not informed. But it was long enough, we may presume, to convince the surviving Israelites that if they had escaped what, for any thing that human skill could do, must have proved inevitable death, it was because they believed on the simple word of God what they had no other ground for believing. There might be those among them who, in sullen and obstinate unbelief, refused to look to the brazen serpent, on the ground that it could avail them nothing to do so. But the melancholy consequences must have proved a salutary warning to others; and while their continued exposure to the attacks of the fiery serpents was fitted to humble them under a deep and abiding sense of their dependence on God, their confidence in the faithfulness of his promises must have gathered strength every day when they saw, and many of them felt, that without a single exception, “if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

But the history before us possesses an interest far beyond its immediate reference to the people of Israel, and the purposes which it served as a salutary discipline in regard to them. Our Lord himself has expressly told us that a great deal more was implied in the brazen serpent than merely an example of the grace and power of God in delivering his people from the calamity which their disobedience had brought upon them. In his interview with Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler, as recorded in the third chapter of John’s Gospel, we find him referring to the transaction before us, as at once typical of his own death, and illustrative of the principle on which the sinner becomes a partaker of the spiritual blessings thereby secured. And, indeed, among the many types or representations by which Christ was prefigured, and the Gospel preached to the Old Testament Church, there

are none, perhaps, in which the great fundamental doctrines of the cross are more clearly exhibited than in the history and the use of the brazen serpent. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And if our Lord has thus told us that the wounded Israelite looking to the brazen servant was typical of the sinner looking to Him as the crucified Redeemer, he has thereby very plainly intimated that the bodily condition of the former, while suffering under the wound of the fiery serpent, was typical of the spiritual condition of the latter, labouring under the malady which sin has inflicted on his moral nature. And, indeed, the very nature of the type, both as regards the evil which overtook Israel, and the remedy employed to counteract it, would lead us to trace this resemblance. It was in the form of a serpent that the great adversary seduced man into sin, and entailed upon him and his posterity not only temporal but eternal death; and it was to bruise the serpent's head, to destroy the works of the devil, that the Son of God was made in the likeness of sinful flesh,—that is, in the likeness of those who by sin had become the seed of the serpent,—and was lifted up upon the cross.

Of all this we are very emphatically reminded by the passage before us, and are naturally led, therefore, to expect, that in the history and experience of the people of Israel, in regard to the infliction and cure of their bodily wounds, we shall find an illustration of the history and experience of those whose spiritual malady has been healed by a believing application to the sovereign remedy provided in the cross of Christ. We are here told of Israel, then, that as "they journeyed from Mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: . . . the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way,"—and they not only expressed their dissatisfaction with the divine dispensations generally, but declared that they loathed the very bread which God had miraculously provided for their support in the wilderness.

And such, it will be found, is the natural feeling of unregenerate men towards that provision which God has made for the spiritual support and refreshment of his people in this their pilgrimage,—even the revelation of his grace and mercy, and the re-

cord of his exceeding great and precious promises in the Gospel. Not only have men in their natural state no relish for such subjects; they have a positive dislike to them. Amidst the multiplicity of other objects, indeed, which solicit their attention,—the numerous pursuits to which they are devoting their strength,—and the variety of enjoyments which are successively coming in to fill up their hours of leisure and relaxation, they may not be sensible of a feeling of enmity to spiritual subjects, just because they have contrived to shut them out almost entirely from their thoughts; and though they may, at stated periods, formally observe certain religious exercises, yet these may never have so seriously engaged their thoughts, or so deeply impressed their conscience, as to enable them to determine how far they do really dislike them. They may be disposed, therefore, to deny that they feel any enmity to spiritual and divine things, and to allege that they can not only tolerate them, but even bestow upon them that measure of serious and respectful attention which is befitting or necessary. But let them conceive themselves to be placed in regard to a future life, the heavenly Canaan, in similar circumstances to those of the Israelites in respect to the land of promise,—let them suppose that the present life becomes to them a laborious and weary pilgrimage, where the world can minister no more to their gratification, than the wilderness could do to the necessities and comfort of the people of Israel,—let them conceive themselves so circumstanced that their main enjoyments were to be drawn from the hope of the future, and that they had nothing to look to for supporting their fainting spirits but the consoling promises of Scripture, and the gracious communications of the Holy Spirit to their souls; and if they could in any good measure realise to their own mind such a state of things, they must be conscious, that with their present feelings, and affections, and desires, they would be ready to say of spiritual things, as Israel did of the manna, “Our soul loatheth this light bread.”

There are many, I believe, now in the enjoyment of peace with God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who will be ready to acknowledge that at one time their views and feelings in regard to spiritual and divine things were such as I have now represented. They were not then really convinced that they were sinners in the Scripture acceptation of that word,—that is,

they did not really believe that they were under the curse of God's broken law, and, therefore, bound over by the sentence of that law to the endurance of the penalty which it denounces against transgressors. They did not, therefore, feel their need of any special or supernatural interposition for their deliverance. They were contented with their condition, and with the measure of happiness which the world yielded them, so long as there was no very serious inroad upon their enjoyments; and when such inroads did occasionally take place, they found comfort, not in the Bible, or in any thing connected with the Bible, but in a sort of vague hope that things would become better, and that their disappointments and vexations would be compensated by a more fortunate and favourable course of events. They cast about for comfort in every direction, except that from which alone true comfort could come to them. In the meantime, they might be dealt with as we cannot doubt Moses dealt with the people of Israel,—admonishing them on the subject of their sin and folly in seeking to be happy independently of God's blessing, and even in despite of his displeasure. They can remember, perhaps, with what indifference they heard all such remonstrances,—how unwilling they were to believe that their disinclination to divine truth, and their preference of worldly enjoyments, were either unseasonable in themselves, or proofs of their being enemies to God, and alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them,—how readily they evaded the force of any representation that went to assign them a place among the children of disobedience,—or if they felt it difficult at times to shut their eyes to the truth and faithfulness of such representations, they may remember how they either laboured to forget, or boldly determined to disregard them.

And so they would have continued to do, if He who subdued the haughty and rebellious spirit of Israel had not himself directly dealt with them. They are now convinced that no power could ever have disarmed their hostility, or reconciled them to a subject which found not one congenial sentiment in their breast, if the Spirit of God had not awakened them to a sense of their guilt and misery. They will confess that the power which convinced the Israelites of their sin was the power by which they also were made sensible of the mortal malady

with* which they were infected, and that the fiery serpents which wounded Israel, and the sharp arrows which pierced their own hearts, were both alike the appointed agents of Him who knows how to subdue the people under him.

The change which has taken place in their sentiments and feelings may have been neither so rapid nor so distinctly marked as in the case of the Israelites, whom we find earnestly supplicating the interposition of the very man whom a little before they had been loading with reproach, as the author of all that was painful and harassing in their condition. They may have experienced many a disappointment,—they may have fled for refuge to many a device from the vexations and trials of life,—and they may have made trial of many a scheme for securing that peace which something from within was all the while telling them no earthly object had the power of conferring. But when they were brought to perceive that all their disquietude proceeded from their sinfulness,—that their estrangement from God had shut them out from the repose and happiness which they were so eagerly seeking,—and that there could be no permanent peace for them so long as their controversy with him was maintained,—there did then take place in their sentiments a change as real and unequivocal as that which is exemplified in the passage before us. Under the convictions of an awakened conscience, and the urgency of the inquiry how they might find pardon and acceptance with God, they were more than reconciled to the subject which they formerly loathed and disregarded. Their salvation then assumed an interest and an importance which, in their estimation, gave a comparative littleness to all that they once thought most interesting. The topics on which they were formerly unwilling to spend one serious thought became the subject of their daily and most anxious consideration. And they were disposed to court the society and listen to the admonitions of those whose sentiments were at one time the most uncongenial to their own, and with whom they were unwilling to hold any converse.

And can the careless and the carnally-minded, then, have any difficulty in deciding on their spiritual state, if they will but seriously entertain the subject? I pretend not to describe any one method of procedure as the only one which the Spirit of God

adopts in his saving operations on the heart of sinners ; nor do I venture to propose any standard whereby to measure the intenseness of feeling that may be awakened in the soul of any individual at the time of its conversion. But no man surely can have any difficulty in conceiving himself placed in similar circumstances with the wounded Israelite in the wilderness, or be at any loss in forming some idea, at least, of what his feeling of anxiety would be in such a situation. And if, therefore, he would but ask himself, whether he has ever felt any thing at all of the same anxiety with regard to his spiritual malady, his heart could hardly fail to return a ready and unequivocal answer. I speak not of the depth or the intenseness of his anxiety. The simple question is, whether he has been as thoroughly convinced of the reality and inevitable consequences of his spiritual disease, if not counteracted, as the Israelites were of the fatal effects of the wound of the fiery serpents,—and whether he has applied, with the same simplicity and sincerity as they did, to the only remedy by which he can be healed. This is a question about which there is no vagueness, I think, if the sinner is only willing to put it to himself, and anxious to have it answered ; and, if seriously proposed and pondered, it could hardly fail to disclose to him much respecting the state of his heart and affections, which it is most important for him to know,—even whether he has yet really fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him in the Gospel.

To those who are willing seriously to entertain this question, and anxious to have it satisfactorily settled, the example of the Israelites is full of instruction. We are here told, that when the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, they bit the people, and much people of Israel died. This statement would seem to intimate, what indeed we might very naturally suppose, that it was not till after they had had multiplied proofs of the irremediable nature of the wounds which had been inflicted on them, that they recognised the judgment of God, confessed their guilt, and implored deliverance. Nor can we doubt that, in the meantime, they had betaken themselves to other methods of relief,—that they had sought by their own skill to arrest the fatal disease, and stay the work of destruction and death,—and that it was not till they had witnessed many an unavailing effort, on

the part of those who had sunk under the malady, that they were brought in humility and self-abasement to supplicate the interposition of Moses. But being convinced that the hand of the Lord was turned against them, and that they were maintaining a controversy with him as desperate as it was daring, they surrendered themselves to the conviction that He only could help them, and were ready with confiding simplicity to look and wait for relief in the way of his own appointing.

Such also will be found, in many cases, to be the progress of the believer from a state of painful and harassing apprehension, to a state of tranquillity and repose, when, in the exercise of faith in Christ, he becomes a partaker of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. It happens, I believe, not unfrequently, that even after the sinner has been brought under convictions of sin, and after he has not only felt the impossibility but seen the folly of attempting to stifle these convictions, he has continued for a season to act somewhat after the manner of Israel. He has sought to disarm the law of the terrors which had awakened his conscience, by endeavouring to yield a satisfactory obedience to its demands. He has fancied to himself, if he could but acquire a certain measure of virtuous habits, and attain to a certain degree of virtuous conduct, his conscience would be soothed into a state of peace. And as often as a new discovery of the purity and spirituality of the divine law disclosed to him some new sin of heart or life which he did not before discover, he hastened to contend with and resist it, in the hope that he would thereby be brought a step nearer to that rest which he was so anxiously seeking to attain.

And so far it is well ; for every man is under an eternal obligation to abandon whatever he discovers in his heart and life to be contrary to the revealed will of God. But the sinner who shall seek in this way to reach a state of peace, and to have the anguish of a wounded conscience healed, will assuredly be disappointed ; and there are many who, from their own experience, can bear testimony to the truth of this remark. They will acknowledge that every new discovery of the purity and rigour of the divine law, even with all their efforts to bring themselves into a conformity to it, only brought with it a more depressing sense of guilt and danger,—that the more closely they brought

that law to bear on their heart and life, the farther did they feel themselves receding as it were from the point at which they hoped to find rest to their souls in a sense of God's forgiveness,—that if for a moment they experienced any thing like complacency and satisfaction in what might be esteemed virtuous and praiseworthy in their conduct, their heart misgave them as often as the question recurred, Am I yet reconciled to God, and have I received the forgiveness of sin?—and that after all their laborious efforts, their spiritual disease, so far from being healed, rather grew worse.

And how was it that they did at last find peace? It was by looking to the cross of Christ, as the wounded Israelite looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness. They were, perhaps, frequently admonished thus to look and be healed, before they were persuaded and enabled to do so. They hesitated, as it were, to venture their all on the simple belief of the divine testimony, and were afraid altogether to abandon their own righteousness, insufficient though they had hitherto found it to be. They might have had some kind of indistinct notion, that it was only for Christ's sake that their own obedience could be accepted for their justification before God. But it was still upon that obedience that they really relied, and expected to be justified. They trembled at the idea of feeling themselves stripped of every vestige of righteousness, and exposed defenceless to all the terrors of the divine law, as every sinner must feel himself to be at the moment that he transfers his hope from his own obedience to the righteousness of the Redeemer.

But having been persuaded to relinquish the last lingering hope that rested on their own efforts to satisfy the divine law, and, with a look of utter helplessness and self-abandonment, to turn a believing eye to the all-sufficiency of Christ, they felt that an efficacious virtue had gone forth to heal them,—they began to experience the first soothing influence of that peace of God which passeth understanding; and being delivered from the condemnation of the law as the covenant of works, and brought under it as a law of love,—the revealed will of that almighty Saviour who had brought them from a fearful pit, and from the miry clay, who had set their feet upon a rock, and established their goings,—they can date from the same period a

cheerfulness and a sincerity in their obedience to that law, which all the rigour of its requirements and all the terrors of its sanctions could never have called forth. It was then that the love of Christ began to constrain them to live no more to themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and who rose again.

I need not dwell at any length on the consolation and encouragement which the subject before us is fitted to minister to mourners in Zion,—to the downcast and broken in spirit. If there be one circumstance more than another which characterises this portion of Holy Writ, it is the testimony which it bears to the freeness of the Gospel overtures, as addressed to sinners of every degree,—as inviting all the ends of the earth to look unto Christ and be saved. And yet there may be some who, though earnestly longing to be partakers of the peace which the Gospel is designed to impart, are not conscious of having yet tasted it,—some who are satisfied that the way by which God purposes to receive them into favour is the best as well as the only possible way, but are yet in a state of doubt whether they have been brought into it,—and who are not only anxious to give implicit credit to the testimony which God has given concerning his Son, but feel that the idea of its not being true would consign them to a state of hopeless and irremediable wretchedness, while at the same time they dare not allow themselves to believe that they have been reconciled to God by the blood of the cross.

The condition of such persons may, in their own estimation, be similar to what we could suppose to have happened in the case before us. Though the brazen serpent was elevated on a pole, or raised up as an ensign, that all who were wounded might see it, we could conceive it possible that a more daring or a more thoughtless individual among the Israelites might have wandered to a distance from the camp,—and that he might there feel himself to be wounded where he was unable to command a view of the object by which alone he could be healed. And in such a situation we can have no difficulty in conceiving what terror and dismay would be awakened when he began to feel that the hand of death was upon him,—how quickly he would abandon the object of his pursuit, however intent he might have been on obtaining it,—with what an anxious eye he would survey the

distance over which he had to travel, before he came within the sphere of that efficacious influence from which he had withdrawn himself,—and how powerfully every new symptom of his fatal malady would excite him to another effort to reach the spot from which he might look and be healed.

And such may, in their own apprehension, be the condition of some who would willingly look to the cross of Christ,—but who feel as if the distance to which they had wandered away from God had invested the object of their anxious search with a dimness or obscurity which their eye cannot penetrate. But need I tell them, that though such a case as I have now supposed might have taken place under the imperfection of a type, where a sensible object was the only medium through which the divine agency was imparted, the object to which the sinner is invited to look can never be circumscribed by times or places,—that the healing efficacy which flows from the cross of Christ can reach the utmost limit of the sinner's alienation from God,—and that if they will but look and believe, far off as they may feel themselves to be, it has lost nothing in the distance of its efficacy to heal? Let them inquire whether it is not something of self-righteousness that is obscuring their faith, and throwing a cloud over their hopes,—whether it is not something of pride rather than humility that keeps them at a distance from the Source of light and life. But whatever may be the immediate cause of their anxieties, let them not turn to any other quarter for relief, nor look to any other object for the virtue that is to heal their spiritual disease. Let them still fix their eyes on Him who promised that when he was lifted up, he would draw all men unto him,—let them wait with patient and persevering supplication for a spiritual manifestation of the truth to their conscience,—and let them rest with assurance on the gracious promise, that they shall know the Lord, if they follow on to know him,—that “his going forth is prepared as the morning,”—and that “he shall come unto them as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth.”

There is still one practical lesson suggested by the narrative before us, to which I would for a moment advert,—a lesson especially designed for those who have already experienced joy and peace in believing. As the Israelites prayed that the serpents

might be taken away from them, so Christians may have felt a desire to be at once and completely freed from all that is distressing in a sense of sinfulness, and all that is perplexing in the assaults of temptation. This, however, is not the procedure which Infinite Wisdom has seen meet to adopt towards believers. The healed Israelite had no assurance that he never would be again wounded; nor has the Christian any express promise that, having once experienced peace, that peace shall never again be disturbed. But if the Israelite, in being once healed, had no security against the attacks of the fiery serpents, neither was the efficacy of the prescribed remedy limited to a first application; and though the believer, in consequence of the remaining corruption of his heart, and the temporary prevalence of unbelief, may again experience disquietude and apprehension, the healing virtue to which he once applied is still as free and as efficacious as ever. And his own experience must tell him that at such seasons of depression and fear, his relief comes, not from the recollection that he had once looked, and had once been healed, but from looking again, in the exercise of faith and simple dependence on Christ; and he will find that his obedience is never so cheerful and uniform as when he is most frequently renewing his acceptance of Christ for pardon, and sanctification, and eternal life, as offered in the Gospel. Let every new announcement of the Gospel offer, then, be met on his part by a new and solemn acquiescence in its gracious proposals. While he feels that every new wound which sin inflicts on the conscience requires the same balm which first healed him, let him remember that the blood of Christ is still efficacious to pacify the troubled spirit; for, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so has the Son of man been lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.

LII.

B A L A A M.

NUMBERS XXIII. 18-24.

THESE verses contain one of various predictions uttered by the mouth of Balaam, whom Balak, king of Moab, had hired to curse Israel, while they lay encamped in the plains of Moab, over against Jericho, ready to pass over Jordan to take possession of the promised land. The predictions thus delivered were dictated by the Spirit of God,—for so we are expressly told in this, as well as in the preceding and following chapters ; and they contain, moreover, not only prophecies which immediately concerned Moab and the other nations round about Canaan, but exceeding great and precious promises also, which have been in progress towards fulfilment from the day they were uttered till the present hour, but which will not be exhausted till Christ has received the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. We might naturally conclude, then, that this man, who was employed to foretell events so important in themselves, and so deeply interesting to the Church in all future times, must have been in the enjoyment, not only of that peace with God which is the common inheritance of believers, however humble and obscure their condition, but of special marks and tokens of the divine favour,—such as were wont to be vouchsafed to the most eminent saints,—those who occupied the honourable and distinguished place of messengers from God to man. And in the preceding chapter, where he is

first brought under our notice, some things are said of him which would seem to intimate, not only that he had some right apprehensions of the character and sovereignty of the true God, but that the authority of God was with him supreme, taking the precedence of all other motives and considerations in determining his conduct and mode of acting. But a very slight examination, I fear, will lead us to a very different conclusion; and show that whatever his knowledge might be, his heart was not right with God.

Though the predictions which Balaam delivered contained most momentous truths and very precious promises, which are altogether independent of his character, being, as we are assured, the dictates of the Holy Ghost; yet the consideration of that character will be found to give a peculiar interest to what he was made the instrument of communicating. And to form a right estimate of this remarkable person, the plainest and shortest method of procedure, I think, has been suggested by himself. In a preceding part of this chapter, we find him, after pronouncing a blessing on Israel in language of great sublimity and beauty, exclaiming, apparently with a deep feeling of earnestness, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" We are naturally led, then, to ask, What was the manner of his death, and what light does that event throw upon his character? And on this point we have ample information. We are told in the thirty-first chapter of this book, that the Lord commanded Moses to avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, or, as it is also expressed, to avenge the Lord of Midian; and "Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, . . . and they warred against the Midianites, and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain: . . . Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword." The reason of the severe judgment thus executed upon the Midianites was, that during the encampment of Israel in their neighbourhood, they contrived by their wiles to seduce the people into a participation of their idolatry and other abominable practices, so that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and there died of them by the plague twenty and four thousand. And that Balaam was the guilty author of the plot, whereby the people were tempted to join themselves to

Baal-peor, is not only intimated in the manner and circumstances of his death, but is elsewhere asserted in express terms; for in the second chapter of Revelation he is described as the man "who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

There is not, perhaps, on record a more melancholy example of dark malignity against the people of God, and desperate resistance against God's declared purposes, than was thus exhibited by Balaam. Not only had he been assured frequently, and in the most express terms, that the blessing of God rested on the people of Israel; but he was himself commissioned to pronounce that blessing in every form and variety of language that could express its certainty and value,—declaring, at the same time, his conviction of the folly of attempting to defeat God's revealed decree, and apparently acquiescing in that decree. "Balak the king of Moab," said he, "hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?" And again, after renewed solicitation on the part of the king of Moab,—“Rise up, Balak, and hear: . . . God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. . . . Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.” And, finally, we are told that, “when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness, . . . and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his parable,”—giving utterance to some of the sublimest prophecies and most precious promises concerning the coming of Christ and the prosperity of his Church which are to be found in Scripture. And yet, while he thus pronounced, and apparently acquiesced in, the blessing on Israel, and was convinced that if he had dared to curse them, his curse would have been alike impotent and perilous,—yet such was his malignity, and such his infatuation, that he not only conceived,

but carried into effect a plot, whereby he thought that Israel would bring upon themselves the curse which he durst not or had not the power to pronounce. And to a certain extent his artifice, which in character did very closely resemble that of the great deceiver, who was from the beginning a liar and a murderer, did succeed ; for though it was impossible that he could by any artifice reverse the blessing which God had pronounced, and which Balaam himself was constrained to utter, yet he brought a sore judgment on Israel, in consequence of the sin into which he seduced them. "Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor : and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people,"—that is, the chief men who had fallen into Balaam's snare,—“and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.” But, in the meantime, the plague had begun in the camp generally ; and “those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.”

The real character of Balaam is thus placed beyond all doubt or dispute, and is further illustrated by the frequency with which we find him referred to in Scripture, and in terms which imply that he was pre-eminent among the enemies of God and his Church. But the question naturally occurs, how a man of such a character should have been admitted to intimate converse with God, or should have been employed to foretell what the holiest of God's prophets would have been honoured in communicating. To this question it may be replied, that the history of Balaam furnishes a most striking manifestation of the sovereignty of God, such as Israel specially needed, and such as is full of instruction to the Church of all times. That Balaam, to a certain extent, knew and professedly worshipped the true God, cannot, I think, be doubted ; for on no other supposition can much of what he said and did be explained. And belonging, as we are elsewhere told that he did, to Mesopotamia, the original country of Abraham, and the birth-place of most of the children of Jacob, we can easily understand how he might have received from tradition, which must have lingered there long after its light was almost extinguished in other lands, some notions of the existence, power, and sovereignty of the one only living and true God. But it is

equally clear, I think, that these notions must either from the first have been held in connection with very unworthy conceptions of the moral attributes of God, or have been very soon perverted by the influence of a depraved heart,—a heart that was habitually going after its covetousness. It is evident, from the moment at which Balak opened a communication with him, that while he professedly worshipped the true God, and sought counsel at the mouth of the Lord as to what he was to say and do, he believed also that God was to be influenced by certain superstitious rites, here denominated divination or enchantment, such as idolatrous nations were wont to observe in order to procure the interpositions of their deities. When the princes of Moab first came to him, it is obvious that he eagerly grasped at the prospect of reward which Balak's proposal held out to him, and cherished the hope that he might be enabled to curse Israel, as the king of Moab requested, notwithstanding an explicit revelation to the contrary. For when God came to him and said, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed;" he returned to the princes of Balak, and merely said, "The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you,"—taking care to conceal the more important part of the divine communication forbidding him to curse Israel, and declaring that they were blessed,—evidently because such a declaration would, in all probability, have put an end to the applications of Balak, and, consequently, to the covetous expectations of Balaam.

Accordingly, when Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than the former, and with still larger promises of the reward of divination, Balaam, instead of at once declaring that it was vain, inasmuch as God had pronounced Israel blessed, still entertained the hope that he might yet have the power of cursing Israel; for though he declared that he could "not go beyond the word of the Lord his God, to do less or more,"—no, not though Balak should give him his house full of silver and gold, yet he invited them to tarry that night till he should know what the Lord would say unto him more,—as if, in opposition to what he was afterwards constrained to acknowledge, God were "a man that he should lie," or "the son of man, that he should repent." And when leave was given him to go, but only for the purpose of blessing Israel, as was plainly intimated

to him, so eager was he to avail himself of the permission, that he does not appear to have waited for the princes of Moab to call him or renew their request, which was the condition on which he was allowed to go, but "rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass," and set forth,—evidently in the hope that his being permitted to go was the first step towards his being ultimately permitted to curse Israel. And this was the ground, I think, on which, after leave was given him to go, it is said that "God's anger was kindled because he went." He went with the secret purpose of cursing those whom God had already declared to be blessed, and in the hope that, in virtue of his divination and enchantments, he might alter the purpose of Him who is the God of truth,—the ever-living and unchangeable, the faithful and covenant-keeping God.

This must have been his state of mind, inasmuch as it is expressly declared of him, as the reason of his going to Balak, that "he loved the wages of unrighteousness,"—while he was well aware that cursing Israel was the only ground on which he could look for these wages. But he "was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet,"—a rebuke peculiarly fitted to show him the folly of attempting to alter or defeat the counsel of God, and to impress him with a sense of the divine sovereignty,—the infinite facility with which God could employ any instrument for accomplishing his purposes, whether of judgment or of mercy. Balaam must have been humbled as well as awed by this manifestation of divine power, whereby he was made to feel that while in the estimation of his fellow-men he could wield at pleasure a supernatural influence wherewith to bless or to curse, he was in reality as impotent, either for the one or the other, as the irrational creature on which he rode. And that he was humbled, as well as alarmed, is evident from the readiness which he showed to return. Yet having again received permission to proceed, he did not even then abandon the hope that ultimately he might succeed in pleasing Balak, and gratifying his own covetousness; for it is plain, I think, that it was some such secret hope which prompted him once and again to have recourse to enchantments. And in thus cherishing his ungodly desire and impious expectation, he furnishes a striking example

of that judicial blindness wherewith we are assured that they who receive not "the love of the truth," but have "pleasure in unrighteousness," are sometimes smitten, when God sends them "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

And here may be one reason why God saw fit to make direct communications to Balaam,—even to furnish, in the example of that individual, a solemn warning to men of the guilt and danger of sinning against their light, or, as the apostle emphatically expresses it, holding "the truth in unrighteousness." That Balaam had been favoured with the light of divine truth, at least to a considerable extent, is very obvious. Some, indeed, suppose that he had been employed at one time as a prophet of the true God, and that the predictions which he delivered in that character formed the ground of the reputation which he had acquired, and which must have been very extensive, when we find Balak saying to him, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." And if this supposition be well-founded, then the guilt which he incurred in prostituting his distinguished privilege to the gratification of his covetousness, though not unexampled, was indeed of the most aggravated kind, and would fully explain why it was that, even with the knowledge which he possessed of the true God, he was given up to the miserable delusion of confiding in divination and enchantments. But however this may be, it is abundantly obvious, that whatever was the extent of his light, he sinned against that light,—that whatever might be the amount of his knowledge of divine truth, he held that truth in unrighteousness. He was not, indeed, utterly devoid of all sense of God's authority, and all regard for God's approbation. On the contrary, he dared not directly to go against the express command of God, even when tempted to do so by what was to him the most powerful of all temptations; and from the resoluteness with which he repeatedly resisted Balak's solicitations, and, to all appearance, set at nought his proffered honours and rewards, one might almost suppose that he regarded all the gifts and distinctions of a worldly kind as utterly worthless when brought into competition with obedience to the divine will, and the enjoyment of the divine favour.

And yet, on a review of his whole history as here recorded, it is plain that these honours and rewards engrossed his whole

heart and affections, and that, from first to last, he was exercising all his ingenuity to find out some way of gratifying his avarice and his ambition, without doing violence to his conscience. The check which was imposed upon him, by an immediate and explicit command of God, was too strong to be recklessly broken through and disregarded. But in the blindness and infatuation which sin, when it obtains the mastery, never fails to produce in its unhappy captive, he betook himself to various artifices whereby he hoped to remove that check ; and though these failed in consequence of his being in circumstances where the command was kept full in his view, and therefore pressed home upon his conscience, yet, at a future period, and when placed in different circumstances, he sought, and no doubt found, the gratification of the unholy principles which had gained the ascendancy in his heart, by perpetrating a deed, as we have already seen, in some respects more atrocious than that which he had been restrained from committing,—I mean, laying a stumbling-block before Israel, and seducing them into idolatry.

This is, no doubt, a melancholy picture of guiltiness and inconsistency. But, except in degree, I fear it is the delineation of a very common character ; for are there not multitudes who, in order to indulge in their favourite sins, are compelled to impose upon themselves in various ways, to make their escape from the authority of an express commandment, which their conscience would not permit them openly and flagrantly to violate ? If they allowed themselves impartially to consider those commandments of the divine law which bear most directly against their favourite indulgence, their besetting sin, and to try their conduct, not by the letter, but by the spirit of the law, they would be compelled, perhaps, by the remonstrances of conscience which they could not silence, to abandon their sinful course ; for they would feel that there is a power in conscience when so awakened, and especially when quickened by the concurring testimony of the Word of God, which would convert the sweetest of their gratifications into gall and wormwood. Their only recourse then is to yield to the remonstrances of conscience and the express declarations of the divine law, and by some measure of self-restraint, and by some plausible palliations of their sin, to contrive how they may retain that sin without doing such violence to their

own minds as would utterly destroy all the enjoyment which their indulgence can yield them. It is thus that, I fear, multitudes, in spite of many misgivings, continue to pursue a course which, if persevered in, must be fatal to their future well-being, and inconsistent with any thing like true, solid peace, even here. On other points not connected with their own besetting sin, they may show much respect for the authority of the divine law, and be even scrupulous in their observance of it; for besides the manifold excuses which men contrive to plead for their favourite indulgence, and the various palliations by which they persuade themselves that, in their circumstances, the line of conduct which they are unwilling to abandon is unavoidable, and, therefore, almost, if not altogether allowable, they find it necessary, also, in aid of their false reasonings, to have recourse to compromise,—to purchase, as it were, a licence to dispense with one requirement of the divine law, by a rigorous adherence to another, with which it does not cost them so great an effort to comply.

It were endless to illustrate these general remarks by particular examples. But worldly men, who have something of a religious profession, will have no difficulty in making the application, if they are willing to do so. And what is this but the principle on which Balaam acted? In his case, that principle was brought out more clearly, and may appear to us more revolting than in ordinary circumstances, because the conflict which he maintained was with an immediate revelation made to himself personally, from which we may think it impossible that any man could make his escape. But this itself is a delusion. It is just to assume that a miraculous communication of the divine will must always and necessarily command the acquiescence and submission of those to whom it is so made,—an assumption than which nothing is more unfounded, as the recorded history of God's dealings with men has abundantly proved. The man who is daily labouring to evade what his conscience tells him is the authoritative word of God as he reads it in the Bible, and to justify, or palliate, or find an excuse for what in his conduct is opposed to that word, would in like manner deal with the same authority, if it were every day spoken to him by God himself from heaven. The experiment has often been made, and the result has been what I have now stated. If Balaam's character, then, stands out in clearer and more decided opposition to the

authority of God than that of unregenerate men now, it is only because that authority was made known to him in a more direct and palpable way,—that is, by immediate and miraculous interposition. But the man who contrives to silence his conscience, and to evade the force of the divine law in regard to the course of living which he is determined at all hazards to pursue, or, at the best, has only some vague thought of hereafter altering, is acting on the same principle that Balaam did; and in the history of that individual, he has a very striking example of a heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,—and a very solemn warning, that God may, and often does, in righteous judgment, send a strong delusion to such sinners, that they should believe a lie.

This, as I have remarked, might be one reason why God was pleased to make immediate communications of his will and purposes even to such a man as Balaam. But another and a very important end was served, by making that individual the medium of conveying to the Church such precious truths as we find recorded in the passage we are considering. He was an unwilling witness to the truths which he uttered. He would gladly have uttered a curse when he was constrained to pronounce a blessing; and his history is a recorded example of the great truth, that God maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and restraineth the remainder of his wrath. And as he delivered the truths here related with reluctance, so he did not understand their full import. His moral and spiritual state rendered it impossible that he could. When he said, “God hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel,” he gave utterance to a truth which must have greatly amazed himself; for whether he did or did not know the general character and conduct of Israel during their sojourning in the wilderness, he must have known enough of human nature to make it a very marvellous thing to him that God should see no iniquity or perverseness in that people. And we cannot doubt, I think, that he thought of this when he gave his malignant counsel to Balak, teaching him to lay a stumbling-block before Israel that they might be seduced into idolatry, which he could not but know was high treason on their part against the Lord their God who was with them,—the King who was among them. He evidently thought that if he succeeded in so seducing them, it could no longer be said, “God

hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel ;” and that thus the blessing which he had reluctantly uttered would be converted into the curse which he would most willingly have pronounced.

And even to Israel themselves, the words of Balaam, when they were rehearsed by Moses, must have sounded strangely,—at least to such of them as were accustomed to entertain and ponder the divine communications. They must have been conscious that they deserved no such character as Balaam was instructed to give them ; for about the very same time, Moses, in surveying their history for the forty preceding years, declared that they had been a stiff-necked and rebellious people from the day that he knew them. But while to true believers in Israel, the words of Balaam must have been very humbling, by reminding them of their manifold sins and provocations, their folly and perverseness, they must have also been full of consolation. God did thereby declare to them, as he did also by the mouth of Moses, that it was not because of their righteousness or the uprightness of their heart that he gave them the land of Canaan ; but because he loved them, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto their fathers. It was not, therefore, on account of there being no iniquity or perverseness in them, that God would not permit them to be cursed, as Balak requested, and as Balaam wished that they should be ; but because, in virtue of his covenant, God regarded them as righteous through Him who was one day to seal that covenant with his blood. And such is the ground of the believer’s hope and confidence now. He feels that he is chargeable with much iniquity, and he is conscious that he is very perverse ; but it is his consolation to know that God does not look upon him as he is in himself, but beholds his Shield, and looks on the face of his Anointed,—for whose sake he sees no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel.

Thus was Balaam constrained, against his will, and far beyond what he did or could understand, to proclaim the great fundamental principle on which sinners are saved,—the truth which, from the day it was uttered, has been, and will continue to be, the ground of confidence and the source of consolation to the people of God. And such also was the other great truth which Balaam, with equal reluctance, as we may well believe, was con-

strained to announce:—"Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." This truth was verified in his own case, and must have been a very precious truth to the Church at that time. The people of Israel could not but know that the heathen nations with whom they had to contend, would not only put forth against them all their strength and skill for their defeat and destruction, but that they would call in the aid of the false gods whom they worshipped, and, like Balak, seek to accomplish by supernatural means what by their own strength they were unable to achieve. It is true, these gods were but dumb idols, the work of men's hands,—they could not do evil, neither also was it in them to do good;—but the proneness which Israel generally manifested to fall away to the worship of these false gods did but too clearly show that they were disposed to ascribe to them some mysterious power or influence; and even true believers, therefore, might not be able to divest themselves of fear and anxiety on their account. One of their bitterest enemies, therefore, was made to bear witness that there was "no enchantment against Jacob, neither any divination against Israel,"—unless, indeed, as they soon after learned in their bitter experience, they should forget the Lord who redeemed them, and lightly esteem the Rock of their salvation.

Nor is the truth less interesting and important to the Church still. Believers are warned that a superhuman and a very mysterious power is in active hostility against them; for "we wrestle not," says the apostle, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;" and I fear that it is in consequence of their forgetting that they have such enemies to contend with, that Satan does frequently get advantage of believers. But they who are most careful to bear this solemn truth in remembrance have the least to fear from these formidable foes; for they are assured that He who is for them is greater far than all that can be against them. Christ has said that his Church is founded upon a rock, and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it; and in this gracious declaration he has renewed the assurance in the passage before us, "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel."

LIII.

BALAAAM.

NUMBERS XXIV. 15-19.

WHEN Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, his chief concern, no doubt, was deliverance from what he regarded as a formidable enemy ; for we are told that "Balak saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many : and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." Whereupon he sent unto Balaam, saying, "Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people ; for they are too mighty for me : peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land." But though Balak, perhaps, neither thought of nor cared for any thing beyond being delivered from the threatened invasion of Israel, yet there was involved in the curse, which he was so anxious to have imprecated upon Israel, infinitely more than merely their discomfiture in battle, and their being obliged to relinquish, even if they had entertained the purpose of doing to him as they had done to Sihon, king of the Amorites, and to Og, king of Bashan. The success of Israel in battle, against those who opposed them in their progress towards Canaan, was in itself but a small part of the blessing which they inherited from their father Abraham. That blessing included the promise of the Saviour, and could no more

be reversed than God's purpose, or Covenant of Grace, on behalf of his Church, his elect people, could fail. Israel, indeed, might be and sometimes were worsted in battle, for the chastisement of those who did, and for the punishment of those who did not believe; but while God thus visited their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, he suffered not his faithfulness to fail,—he brake not his covenant, nor altered the thing that had gone out of his lips.

If Israel, however, had been cursed as Balak sought, and as Balaam was ready to have cursed him, it would have been to say, not only that Israel would be defeated in a conflict with Moab, but that the blessing promised to Israel in Abraham was reversed. Whatever Balak and Balaam might understand by the curse itself, or whatever might be the authority by which they expected it to be inflicted, it must be regarded as standing in direct opposition to the blessing which was the inheritance of Israel,—a curse which could not take effect without rendering null and void all that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so it was represented by God himself when he said to Balaam at first, on the messengers of Balak coming to him, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed;" and again, when Balaam was constrained afterwards to say, "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it,"—plainly intimating that if,—a supposition almost too horrid to be expressed,—that if Balaam could have cursed, and if his curse could have taken effect, it would have amounted to a reversal of the blessing pronounced on Abraham,—the utter overthrow of all that had sustained the faith and hope of the Church even from the beginning.

I do not make these remarks for the purpose of placing in an aggravated light, or even endeavouring to estimate, the guilt of Balak and Balaam; for I do not know, and, therefore, am not entitled to determine, how far either the one or the other understood what was implied in the blessing promised to Abraham and to his seed. I am not warranted to say that they deliberately sought to render void that promise which involved in it the coming of Him in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed,—a promise, therefore, on the faithfulness of

which were suspended the hopes of a guilty world. But I refer to what must be understood by cursing Israel, for the purpose of placing in a clearer light the grace and goodness of God towards his Church in making the impious attempt of her enemies against her an occasion not only of renewing his promise, but of constraining these enemies, to their own confusion, to bear testimony to the folly of attempting to curse those whom God had not cursed, or to defy those whom the Lord had not defied. And in this view of the subject we see a very wise as well as obvious reason why Balaam, with all his wickedness, was employed to bless Israel, and to give utterance to the sublimest predictions concerning the glory of Christ and the triumphs of his Church. He was not called, it will be observed, as the prophets of God were, to reveal his will, and to foretell the glory of the latter days. It was only when, in his infatuated love of ungodly gain, he sought to curse the people of God, that he was compelled, to his own confusion, and to the dismay of Balak, to bless them, proclaiming not only his own individual weakness, but the utter impotency of all such attempts to separate between Israel and their God. "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?" "He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it." "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

Such were some of the predictions which we find recorded in this and the preceding chapters; and no wonder that Balak, on hearing them, should have besought Balaam, saying, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all;" no wonder that, in his disappointment and dismay, he should smite his hands together and say, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place." But willingly as Balak would have made his escape from any further disclosures of the divine purposes, Balaam's work as a prophet was not yet done, either as regarded the execution of God's judgments on Moab, or the fulfilment of his promises to Israel. It was not enough that he had been compelled to proclaim, time after time, the

vanity of that ungodly device into which he had so greedily run. He was to foretell, for the warning of the ungodly, and for the encouragement of the Church in all subsequent times, the confusion and ruin which would assuredly overtake all who should in like manner "take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed." Balaam, accordingly, was constrained, before leaving Balak, to take up his parable anew, and to utter what must have been more alarming, as well as more offensive to him than any thing he had yet said. They were about to separate, equally dissatisfied with each other, and not much less so with themselves. Balak was mortified and enraged that the man whom he had hired to curse had only blessed his enemies,—and could find no consolation but in dismissing, in disgrace and with contempt, the man whom he had designed to load with riches and honours: "Flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour." Balaam, on the other hand, seemed to find comfort under his grievous disappointment in retaliating, as it were, upon Balak, and announcing, with something like satisfaction, the judgment which Israel were one day to inflict on Moab: "Behold," said he, "I go unto my people,"—Balak had said, "Flee," or go, get thee "to thy place,"—"Behold, I go unto my people: come, therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days." But while they were thus mutually recriminating one another, as ungodly men will ever do when their ungodly schemes miscarry, they were both but feeble instruments in the hand of Him who hath "made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Whatever gratification Balaam might feel in foretelling the destruction of Moab, the prediction which he uttered must have been as unwelcome to himself as it was to Balak, and must have been uttered not only with all the bitterness of spirit which disappointed covetousness would occasion, but also with the fear and dread which a sense of God's holiness and sovereignty could not fail to awaken. He was taken captive by a divine power, operating not only on his conscience,—so that he did not dare to conceal any thing which God had revealed,—but on every faculty of his soul and body. His eyes were opened to see what to others were the veiled secrets of

futurity. He "heard the words of God,"—he "knew the knowledge of the Most High,"—he "saw the vision of the Almighty,"—he fell, as holier and better men often did, under an overwhelming sense of the divine majesty; but his eyes were open,—his understanding, though blind to objects of sense, was alive to the divine revelation which he was commanded to deliver; and under this supernatural influence, he gave utterance to the sublime prediction in the verses under consideration: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

It is plain, I think, that in these words Balaam speaks, not of the people of Israel, but of an individual. That individual, indeed, was to arise out of Israel, or, in other words, was to be of the seed of Jacob; and the people of Israel, therefore, were to be deeply concerned in the great and glorious things which He was to achieve. Still, the subject of the prophecy was a person or individual,—and a person, moreover, of great dignity and power. He is called a Star—a symbol descriptive of splendour or glory,—and a Sceptre—an equally expressive symbol of regal power and authority. In a subsequent verse he is described as "he that shall have dominion;" and an enumeration is given of some of the great things which he was to achieve. He was to smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth,—Edom and Seir were to be made possessions for their enemies,—that is, for the children of Jacob,—and Israel were to do valiantly; and he was to destroy him that remained of the city. In the whole of the future history of Israel, there is no individual, even the most illustrious of their judges and kings, to whom this prediction can apply in whole, and only one to whom it is partially applicable,—and that is David. Of him it is recorded, that "he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts." In like manner it is said, "He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants." But it is plain that these

achievements fall infinitely short of exhausting the prediction ; and we are led, therefore, to look to Christ for its complete fulfilment. That it should be partially accomplished in David, as many other prophecies of Messiah were, might be expected,—David himself being an eminent type of Christ, and, consequently, exhibiting, in his public and official character, many things which prefigured, though very dimly and imperfectly, the glorious character of Messiah. But in the case before us, as indeed in all similar prophecies, there is ascribed to the person here foretold, what could not be ascribed to any other than Christ,—even universal dominion—absolute sovereignty over the whole human race. Though special mention is made of Moab and Edom, as destined to experience the righteous judgments of the King who was to come out of Jacob, yet the exercise of his power and authority was not to be limited to them. That they should be mentioned was necessary to the immediate purpose for which the prophecy was delivered,—namely, to confound the wicked device of Balak, and to warn him of the ruin which his impious attempt to curse Israel would assuredly bring upon him and his guilty associates. But it is declared of the Sceptre that was to rise out of Israel, that it was to destroy, or rather to subjugate and rule over, all the children of Seth,—that is, over the whole world of mankind ; inasmuch as all men, reckoning from Noah downwards, are included among the children of Seth. Universal dominion, therefore, is ascribed to the person here foretold, and such a dominion as is everywhere in Scripture ascribed to Christ. While it is said of Him, that He has been exalted by the right hand of God, “a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins,” it is also declared that He reigneth, and “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” The whole world of mankind is divided into these two classes ; and to one or other of them every individual belongs. The name Israel is used in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, to denote, not the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, but his spiritual seed,—even the whole body of true believers in all ages, and of all countries. The rest of mankind are denominated the enemies of Christ, and are fitly represented by Moab and Edom. But over them all, as here foretold, Christ has absolute sovereignty. The former he subdues by his

Spirit, making them willing in the day of his power, and ruling over them and in them ; the latter he restrains and controls,—ruling over them also, but ruling them with a rod of iron, and breaking them in pieces like a potter's vessel,—for He has received the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. “ He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”

Such, I apprehend, is the great truth which forms the main subject of this remarkable prophecy ; and the interpretation which I have now offered is further confirmed and illustrated by the symbols here employed to foretell and represent Christ. He is set forth as a Star that should come out of Jacob,—a figure which naturally suggests the idea of splendour or glory, and is, therefore, a most befitting symbol of Him who, as God and man in one person, exhibits all excellence, created and uncreated,—being the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. In reference, also, generally, to the purpose of his manifestation, the symbol is equally expressive and full of meaning. The world of mankind was a fallen world, cast out from God's favour, and cut off from the light of his countenance,—that light which filled the heart of man in his state of innocence with perpetual joy and gladness. From this light men were cut off ; and if justice had taken its course against the guilty, they must have been consigned to the blackness of darkness for ever. The promise of the Saviour,—the Star that was one day to come out of Jacob,—was the first ray which broke in upon this night of sin and woe ; and for many generations before his actual manifestation, it shed light, and comfort, and hope on his Church,—his redeemed people,—and imparted joy and gladness to many a perplexed and penitent soul. From the beginning, even from the moment of man's apostacy, Christ has been, and continues to be, the light of the world,—the only light that could illuminate a world lying in the darkness of spiritual death,—the heavenly light which gave intimation of mercy to the children of wrath,—and the steadfast and unfading light which never has failed or deceived any who have fixed their eye upon it, and taken it for their guide. No symbol, then, could more appropriately be employed to represent the promised Saviour than that of a star,—a solitary light amidst universal darkness,—a

heavenly light, announcing a place of rest to the weary and worn-out wanderer.

And, accordingly, no figure is more frequently employed in Scripture to set forth Christ to the faith and hope of sinners. He is not always, indeed, represented as a star, but light, in one form or other, is a frequent symbol under which he is represented; just as man's guilty and miserable condition as a fallen creature is most comprehensively and emphatically expressed by the figure of darkness. And the experience of individual believers will bear witness to the significancy and beauty of the symbol by which Christ was foretold, when he was spoken of as the Star that was to come out of Jacob. They may, perhaps, remember the time when they first emerged out of the darkness and perplexity in which they found themselves involved, when they made the alarming discovery that they were guilty and condemned, and when, after many fruitless efforts to quiet the accusations and dispel the fears of an awakened conscience, there broke in upon them the blessed truth, that Christ had made an atonement sufficient to cancel all their guilt, and that the benefits of this atonement were at once and freely offered to them,—nay urged, affectionately urged, on their immediate acceptance. Their first clear apprehension of this truth was indeed light from heaven. They might have had, previously to this, something like a faint glimmer of light, while they were groping in darkness, and seeking for a way of escape from the prison-house in which they were held bound by the consciousness of guilt, and the dread of that wrath which God “has revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” They might, under the first convictions of sin and apprehension of danger, seek to take refuge in the thought that if they turned from their sins,—those sins, especially, which lay heaviest upon their conscience,—God would, peradventure, deal mercifully with them, and not exact of them to the full extent of what his law might demand. And between their own repentance, as they would call it, and reformation, on the one hand, and the mercy of God, on the other, they might at times experience a lightening of heart, and feel as if their darkness were dispelled. But they would soon discover that they were following a fitful and fading light,—walking in the light of their own fire, and in the

sparks which they had themselves kindled,—and, therefore, they did again “lie down in sorrow.” Their hope was derived from false views of God’s character, and, therefore, it soon proved to be a hope of which they had reason to be ashamed. But when they saw, and understood, and were enabled to believe with a personal application to themselves, the testimony of God concerning his Son,—even the blessed and most precious testimony, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,”—then they felt that the light which they now saw was indeed light from heaven, that the day had dawned, and that the day-star had arisen in their heart. And so in many subsequent seasons of darkness and disquietude, when, for a time, the light that once shone upon their path, and led them to the Lamb to take away their sin, seemed to be withdrawn or extinguished, and when they were ready to say with Job, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!”

Such seasons, I believe, are not uncommon in the spiritual history of believers; and when at such times they again get a believing view of Christ, as the Lamb of God who taketh away their sin, there is to them a depth of meaning which no exposition can bring out, in the symbol by which Christ is here set forth, when he is described as the Star which has come out of Jacob. It requires no effort of imagination on their part to associate with this symbol the idea of deep and universal darkness, unbroken by a single ray of light, but that which emanates from Christ. With them it is a great reality. Without, and within, all is to them darkness,—utter, hopeless darkness,—but for the light which he sheds around them. In him is concentrated, and from him alone must shine forth, all the light of heavenly hope and consolation which can ever reach their soul; and to them, therefore, he is a solitary, but a bright and most glorious Star, breaking in on what would otherwise be the darkness of death and despair. It was not, therefore, to the Old Testament Church alone, that the symbol, whereby Christ is here foretold, was appropriate and significant, as intimating that, however bright and glorious might be the Star which was to arise in Jacob, the time of its appearance was then very distant.

Now that it has appeared, the symbol is as appropriate and significant as ever, as the experience of believers testifies. And we have Christ's own testimony to the same effect; for, at the very close of the canon of Scripture, in the concluding chapter of the Book of Revelation, and when about to renew his gracious invitation to sinners to come and partake freely of all the blessings of his salvation, the last title which he assumes, the name by which he finally makes himself known is, "the bright and morning Star."

But not less expressive and full of meaning is the other symbol by which Christ is here represented, when he is foretold as the "Sceptre" that should "rise out of Israel." The import of this term, as descriptive of the kingly office of Christ, the sovereignty or universal dominion with which he has been invested, is too obvious to require any lengthened illustration. And, indeed, I have already in some measure anticipated that illustration. But there is, I think, a peculiar significance and force in the union of the two symbols—a Star and a Sceptre—which may not, at first sight, be so obvious. The two objects are in themselves so dissimilar, that we would not, perhaps, expect to find them applied to the same person, at least in close connection, and in the same prophecy. Yet we shall find that they do mutually illustrate one another, and that both were necessary to be employed to bring out fully and clearly what it was the gracious purpose of the Spirit, on that occasion, to reveal concerning Christ. We have already seen that this passage intimates, what is elsewhere plainly taught in Scripture, that Christ's dominion extends to the whole human race, and that they are all subject to his authority, and absolutely at his disposal; but that they consist of two distinct classes,—those who do, and those who do not recognise his rightful sovereignty—the one class being here represented by Israel, and the other by Moab and Edom—and that he exercises his power in ruling these classes in a manner corresponding to the state and character of each respectively. As sinners, all are originally in the same state of condemnation, and do all partake of the same character of alienation "from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." It is by the grace of God,—his sovereign grace alone,—that they are made to differ. And it is in carrying into effect the purposes

of this grace, towards those whom the Father has given him, that Christ exercises his authority and power as King, in a different manner, and to a different effect, from that in which he rules over, restrains, and conquers those who continue in a state of rebellion against him. It is not by an act of mere power that he disarms and subdues the enmity of the carnal mind, and turns sinners from the power of Satan unto God. Power he does no doubt employ, and that too a divine power. But it is the power of his Spirit conveying light to the understanding, and impressing truth on the conscience,—that light which he himself brought from heaven,—that truth which was preached from the beginning, even from the moment at which it was said that the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.

It is by means of this light and truth, the blessed truth of God in “Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,” that his people are made willing in the day of power; and it is by the continued manifestation of the same truth to the conscience, by new and more enlarged discoveries of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” that they are powerfully constrained to live not “unto themselves, but unto him which died for them.” It is, therefore, as the Star that was to arise in Jacob, as well as the Sceptre that was to come out of Israel, that Christ at first subjugates, and continues to govern his people. And even in ruling the impenitent and ungodly, he employs light as well as power; for though that light is not accompanied with a saving efficacy, it is sufficient, in most cases, to disclose enough of their responsibility, to scare them from many an ungodly purpose, and to arm their own conscience with a power which they cannot disregard. The union, then, of the two symbols here employed to foretell Christ, was necessary fully to represent his office as King; and we find them in like manner combined in the New Testament, where our Lord speaks of himself, and of his people. In his message to the church of Thyatira, by the mouth of the apostle John, in the second chapter of Revelation, he conveys to that church the very promise which Balaam was employed to communicate to Israel of old,—a promise of deliverance from, and a triumph over all their spiritual enemies, and of light corresponding to the power with which he was to invest them. “He that overcometh,

and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations ; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers : even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." And in the passage of the same book to which I have already referred, and in which he appropriates to himself the significant title of the Star, even the bright and morning Star, we find him also claiming as his own the other symbol here employed. As God, he was the fountain of all that royal power and authority in virtue of which David did chiefly and pre-eminently typify him ; and as man, he was the son of David, who was to sit on his father's throne. He was thus both the origin and the offspring of David, as king. And, accordingly, we find him on both these grounds asserting his exclusive claim to the kingly office, and in such a connection, that his last declaration concerning himself is, in substance, the very declaration contained in the passage before us : "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star."

There is still a statement in this passage which is fitted, I think, to suggest some very solemn reflections, and to which I would for a moment advert. It is the declaration of Balaam concerning himself, when he said, "I shall see him, but not now ; I shall behold him, but not nigh." We cannot suppose that these expressions meant nothing more than that the appearance of the Star which was to come out of Jacob, and of the Sceptre which was to arise out of Israel, was a very distant event, or, in other words, that the day of Christ was far off. In regard to Christ's manifestation in the flesh, that was an event which Balaam was never to witness ; and if he meant merely to speak of seeing Christ in prophetic vision, he would not have used the expressions, "I shall see," or "I shall behold him ;" for he was at the moment under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, and was at that moment beholding the rising of the Star in Jacob. The language, indeed, plainly intimates that Balaam was actually to see the glorious Person whom he was commissioned to foretell, and points, therefore, to the same solemn event to which Job referred when he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I

see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." This event could be nothing else than the second coming of Christ to judge the world at the last day. But how different the language which Job and Balaam respectively employ, in expressing their anticipations of that great event ! The former, it is evident, was clinging to the prospect of the latter day, distant though it was, as a source of consolation to him under his heavy and accumulated sufferings ; and rejoiced in the thought of being then brought near, even into the very presence of his Redeemer. The latter expressed no satisfaction in the prospect of that day, nor any hope of being admitted to hold fellowship with the glorious Person of whom he spoke : "I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh." This language has appeared to some to intimate that Balaam was made to pronounce his own doom, in foretelling what place he was to occupy in the latter day, when the Lord Jesus shall come to judge the world. But, however this may be, Balaam's words do very solemnly remind us of that great and terrible day, when Christ "cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him," but when they who "know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,"—and of whom, therefore, it may be emphatically said that they "shall see him, but not nigh ;" while "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation," "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Oh ! with what diligence should we seek to be then "found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless," "that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming !"

LIV.

PROMISE TO PHINEHAS OF AN EVERLASTING PRIESTHOOD.

NUMBERS XXV. 10-13.

THE occasion of the blessing here promised to Phinehas is recorded in the preceding verses. The people of Moab, at the instigation of Balaam, as we are elsewhere told, had successfully laid a snare for Israel, first seducing them into gross immorality, and then drawing them into open idolatry ; for “they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods : and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor : and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.” The consequence was that wrath went out from the Lord, and the plague began to destroy, spreading death and lamentation through the camp. In the midst of this terrible judgment, “one of the children of Israel,” “Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites,” “came, and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman, in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand : and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through. . . . So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel,” after there had died thereby twenty and four thousand.

Commentators have thought it necessary to find out reasons

whereby to justify the conduct of Phinehas on the occasion here referred to, lest it might seem to sanction the doctrine, that an individual, on the plea of zeal for the honour of God's law, may take into his own hand the punishment of gross and flagrant transgression. And assuredly there is no difficulty in finding such reasons. The Lord had said to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people," the chief men who had been guilty in the matter of Peor, "and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel." And Moses, in the execution of these instructions, had "said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor." The sin of the leading men of Israel was thus peculiarly offensive in the sight of God, as, indeed, the sin of men in high and influential places must always be, inasmuch as it is more aggravated as committed by them, and more extensively mischievous in its effects: so that to the heads or chief men of Israel must be ascribed no small portion of the guilt which brought down upon the people the righteous judgment of God. But of all the offenders, Zimri was, without doubt, the most daring and determined. He appears to have reckoned on his rank and influence as "a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites," for impunity in his sin, as if none would have the courage to call him to account. Instead of being what, from his station, he ought to have been, a zealous and active co-operator with Moses in carrying into effect the divine command against offenders, he was himself the most reckless and insolent of them all,—openly setting at defiance the authority of God in the person of Moses, and treating with heartless and impious levity the manifestation of the divine wrath which was spreading lamentation and woe through the camp of Israel.

But we could conceive that his very hardihood might, for a moment, overawe those whose duty it was to execute the command of Moses in punishing the guilty; for they could hardly avoid concluding that Zimri must have known that multitudes of his own tribe, and, it may be, of others, were ready to defend and support him, before he could have ventured to act with such impious and haughty daring. While Phinehas, then, had undoubted authority, in virtue of the command of Moses, to inflict punishment on flagrant offenders, it would appear that he

alone had the courage to execute judgment on the guiltiest of them all,—on one who gloried in his strength as well as in his shame ; and that, in his zeal for God's honour and glory, he was ready to put even his life in jeopardy. It is unnecessary, however, to seek for arguments whereby to justify the conduct of Phinehas, or to set forth his fidelity and zeal. Sentence was passed upon that conduct by Him who judges righteous judgment ; for it was in consequence of what he thus did that the Lord said unto Moses, " Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel (while he was zealous for my sake among them,) that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace : and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood ; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel."

It was the will of God, then, that as Zimri's offence was peculiarly aggravated, it should be visited with immediate and signal punishment ; and we cannot doubt that the act inflicting it would have been approved, by whomsoever it was done, if done in obedience to the divine command delivered by Moses. But the fact that Phinehas was the person who had zeal and strength given him to execute God's righteous judgment, gives a special interest to the transaction, as serving to bring out more clearly the great principles which the passage is designed to inculcate. The case of Zimri exhibited an instance of presumptuous or high-handed sinning, of which there had been no example in all respects so aggravated since the making and worshipping of the golden calf in the wilderness of Sinai, nearly forty years before. On that occasion, it will be remembered, that when "Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side ; let him come unto me, . . . all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses. . . . For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother ; that

he may bestow upon you a blessing this day." That the Levites should thus have been commissioned to execute God's judgment, would naturally lead us to connect the transaction with the office to which they were afterwards set apart, when God chose them, "instead of all the first-born" of Israel generally, and appointed them to do the service of the tabernacle, and to pitch round about it, that there might be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel. If their zeal on that occasion was not graciously rewarded, by their being afterwards appointed to the honourable office of ministering unto the tabernacle, it was at least remembered in the blessing which Moses pronounced upon them before his death: and their being commissioned, in preference to any other tribe, to vindicate the honour of God's law, by executing judgment on transgressors, would seem to intimate that there was mercy as well as judgment in what they did,—that punishment was not the only object of their commission,—that the very severity with which they executed that commission was in reality a prompt interposition on behalf of countless multitudes who deserved to die,—and that the death of the three thousand whom they slew was most intimately connected with the turning away of the wrath of God from the whole congregation of Israel.

No attentive and serious reader, I think, can fail to receive, from the transaction to which I have referred, the impression that such was its design and object. But the principle involved in this view of that transaction is brought out still more clearly in the passage before us. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar the high priest; and in the event of his surviving his father, he would himself, of course, according to the divine appointment, be exalted to that high and holy office. He was, in the meantime, a priest; and on the ground of the office which he held, and the high place which he occupied, it became him to be zealous for the Lord God of Israel. But it is plain, I think, that he was animated with a zeal and courage beyond what a mere sense of duty would have awakened; and that, prompt and severe as was the punishment which he inflicted, righteous retribution on the guilty was but a part of the divine purpose which he was appointed to carry into effect. How far he himself understood the full extent of the commission which he received, and

of the effects which the execution of it was to produce, we cannot of course determine. But that he should have been selected to be the instrument of inflicting punishment,—his office as priest being to stand between God and the guilty, to avert judgment, and to make reconciliation for iniquity,—did very plainly intimate that there was mercy in the appointment, and that, how severe soever the infliction of God's wrath might be on individuals, there was still compassion in reserve for the people of Israel. On the other hand, to see the future high priest,—the man who was destined to carry the blood of atonement and incense into the holiest of all, and to present them before God to make reconciliation for the people,—to see him employed in executing judgment on the transgressor, did as emphatically intimate that the divine compassion is not indiscriminate, that it is based on justice, whose demands must, in the first instance, be satisfied, and that it can be exercised only in a way consistent with the honour and integrity of the moral government of God, as the righteous Lawgiver, and the supreme Ruler. And that this was the principle which the transaction here recorded was designed to assert, is expressly declared, inasmuch as the turning away of the fierce anger of the Lord was made to depend on the execution by Phinehas of righteous retribution on the presumptuous offenders. Already had the congregation of Israel assembled, weeping in terror and dismay before the door of the tabernacle; and, no doubt, many a prayer had been poured out in an agony of earnestness,—such prayers as the prospect of immediate and sudden death will sometimes extort even from the ungodly,—that the wrath of God would cease to burn against them. But their tears and their prayers availed nothing. The fatal disease, the messenger of God's displeasure, continued to waste them with unsparing severity; and it was only when Phinehas, under the impulse of a holy indignation, awakened by zeal for God's honour and glory, on the one hand, and by deep concern for the well-being of his brethren, on the other, had put to death the presumptuous offender, that the Lord turned his wrath away, and “the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.”

But the principle of the divine government, which we thus find exemplified in the simple narrative contained in the preceding context, is still more clearly stated and illustrated in the

verses before us. Here we find the divine approbation bestowed upon Phinehas on two grounds; and the first was, that "he was jealous for his God." This is the declaration of the great Searcher of hearts, and, therefore, there can be no doubt as to the first and leading motive by which Phinehas was actuated in putting Zimri to death. In the conduct of that individual, he saw a daring insult offered to the God of Israel,—an open defiance of his authority,—an avowed preference of the abominable impurities of idolatry, to the holy services which had been prescribed to Israel,—an impious denial of the sovereignty of God,—and an attempt, so far as his influence and example could go, to draw the whole congregation of Israel into the same apostasy with himself, and, consequently, to defeat the great purpose of all God's dealings with them, in choosing them for his own people, and working out for them many mighty deliverances, whereby they might be to him "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" in the earth. In contemplating the sin of Zimri, in all its deformity and loathsomeness, Phinehas could not be insensible to its mischievous tendency, as it concerned the people of Israel, and the ruin in which it threatened to overwhelm them;—especially while he saw the desolation which the plague was at that moment spreading throughout the camp, in the death of hundreds and thousands of his brethren. But independently of all such consequences, his eyes were opened to the enormity of the sin which Zimri committed against God; and he not only saw that no respite or relief could be expected to the people from the judgment which lay heavy upon them, but was convinced that it was inconsistent with the rectitude of the divine law, and the maintenance of its honour, to stay that judgment, so long as such a crime remained unpunished. His first and great concern, therefore, was to glorify God, and to vindicate his authority by the infliction of the punishment which was commanded to be visited, without mercy or mitigation, on the idolater, and for which he had received a new and express commission by the mouth of Moses. He might, perhaps, have previously wept and prayed with his brethren at the door of the tabernacle, in the hope that the plague might be stayed. But he saw that if Zimri's presumptuous sin were not promptly visited with the punishment which God had denounced against such transgression, it would become

the sin of Israel, and necessarily bring upon them a new and more terrible infliction of divine wrath. This principle was plainly intimated to Israel, in the law which required presumptuous sinners to be put to death : for when that law was disregarded, or when such offenders became so numerous and so influential that it could not be carried into effect, God took the execution of it into his own hand, and vindicated his authority by the immediate infliction of judgment, by pestilence, or famine, or the sword. The history of Israel abounds with illustrations of this principle, in which are unfolded very interesting views of the moral government of God. But, in the present instance, we have to consider it merely as an assertion of the great truth, that in all God's dealings with men, the first and the great object to be secured is the manifestation of his own glory, the vindication of his rectitude and truth as the Lawgiver and Judge. And this truth was most emphatically asserted, in the approbation which God pronounced upon the conduct of Phinehas, when he not only stayed his avenging hand at the moment Zimri was put to death, but commanded Moses to say to his servant, "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace, . . . even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood ; because he was jealous for his God."

But though this principle in the divine government is thus plainly announced in the sentence of approbation which was passed upon Phinehas, it is in the person of Christ, and his mediatorial undertaking, that the principle has been fully explained and vindicated. However pure and ardent might be the zeal which Phinehas felt for the glory of God, and for the honour of his law, and however promptly he might execute the commission which he had received ; nothing that he or any other creature could do in the way of inflicting punishment on the guilty, could be an adequate expression of God's displeasure against sin, or a full vindication of the honour of his violated law ; and if he was rewarded "because he was jealous for his God," it was a reward of grace, for which he was indebted to Him who was one day to satisfy the demands of divine justice to the very uttermost. Of Christ alone it can be said that "he was jealous for his God," in such a sense as to imply that his zeal was truly worthy of its object, and that the manifestation of it was such as to maintain, in unsullied purity, the honour of God's holy and righteous law.

And this view of Christ's mediatorial work is very impressively brought before us in this passage, where our attention is specially drawn to his zeal for the Father's glory as the first and great motive by which he was actuated in undertaking that work. It is a view which, I fear, we are too much in danger of overlooking. The result of the undertaking in the salvation of sinners, and the love which prompted Christ to do and to suffer so much in the room of the guilty, are most frequently, perhaps, the subject of our contemplation, when we think of Christ at all, being the subject that does most nearly concern us; and though at such times we can hardly avoid remembering, that in thus working out redemption for sinners, he did also magnify the divine law and make it honourable,—yet this last view of the divine interposition is, perhaps, not so often the immediate subject of meditation with us as it ought to be. We are in danger of feeling, in regard to it, as if it had been a secondary object in the great work which Christ came to finish,—necessary, perhaps, but still rather as the removal of an obstacle which stood in the way of saving sinners, than as, in itself, the greatest and most worthy of all objects. It is, however, very differently represented in Scripture.

No doubt, there was an obstacle which stood in the way of the extension of pardon to the guilty. The divine law had been dishonoured, and its violated honour required to be vindicated and its demands fully satisfied before the transgressor could be forgiven. This, moreover, could be accomplished only by the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilling all the demands of that law, and, at the same time, enduring the penalty which it exacted of transgressors. But Christ undertook to do and to suffer all this, not merely because that was necessary to the accomplishment of his great and gracious purpose of saving sinners, at whatever cost of sorrow and suffering. There was another and a prior object that was dear to him, and which never ceased to fill his holy human soul, during his manifestation in the flesh. That was the vindication of his Father's honour as the great Lawgiver. In doing so he did, indeed, remove the barrier which sin had erected between God and his fallen creatures; but, in removing that barrier, he was not labouring, and suffering even to agony, in a work which afforded him no satisfaction, except in so far as it enabled him to secure

the salvation of those whom the Father had given him. Independently of this blessed result of his obedience unto death, there was, in that obedience, and in all the anguish which he endured in rendering it, the accomplishment of an object which occupied the first place in his heart, and which, of itself, would have been to him a reward for all his travail. He glorified his heavenly Father,—he magnified his law, and made it honourable,—he vindicated, in the sight of the whole intelligent creation, the unchangeable rectitude of the divine administration. He saw that by submitting, as he did, to be made under the law, and to satisfy its demands, as if he had been chargeable with the guilt of those who transgressed it, he paid a homage to that law which could not have been rendered to it, either by the perfect obedience of men, or by their punishment if they transgressed.

And in thus doing honour to the law, he was accomplishing an object very dear to his heart,—an object that took precedence even of the salvation of sinners. The two objects—glorifying God, and saving sinners—were indeed inseparable. But the former was that which occupied the first place in the mind of Christ. So the Scriptures testify when they represent Christ in ancient prophecy saying, what was fully verified when he came to tabernacle among men,—“Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” “For thy sake I have borne reproach: shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” Such also is the evidence furnished by the New Testament, where we find our Lord declaring, that he came not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent him; that so far from destroying or setting aside the law, he had undertaken to fulfil and honour it, inasmuch as not one jot or tittle should pass from it till all was fulfilled; and that when his work was drawing towards a close he could say,—“Father, . . . I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” This was the greatest and the most worthy of all ends, and it was that which occupied the first place in the mind of Christ: and we have yet had but a very partial view of the glory of his mediatorial under-

taking, and have conceived but very imperfectly of the deformity and infinite demerit of sin, if we have not seen that Christ has been highly exalted, and has received a name that is above every name, not merely because he loved sinners and died for them, but also, and chiefly, "because he was jealous for his God."

But there was a second ground on which the divine approbation was awarded to Phinehas, for the part which he took in the transaction here recorded ; and that was, because he "made an atonement for the children of Israel," and turned away the wrath of God from them. That Phinehas did nothing that could make a real atonement for Israel, or be a sufficient reason for God's turning away his wrath from them, is too plain a proposition to require either proof or illustration. If, on that or on any other occasion, God forgave the sins of Israel, and did not visit them with righteous retribution to the full extent of their transgressions, it was because of his covenant,—the Covenant of Grace entered into with his Son on behalf of his elect people, and revealed to Abraham, accompanied with a promise that in his seed that covenant should be established. But, to avert or stay the temporal judgment which Israel had brought on themselves by their sin in the matter of Peor, it was necessary that such a demonstration of the divine holiness and rectitude should be given, as did clearly show that there could be no mercy exercised at the expense of justice. And in this sense Phinehas did make an atonement for the children of Israel, when, by slaying the daring and presumptuous offender, he rendered it consistent with the great principles of the divine procedure towards Israel, to turn away from them the wrath which they deserved, and which could really be turned away only for the sake of Him who was himself to bear that wrath in the room of sinners.

But the point to which our attention is chiefly directed by the statement which we are now considering, is that God expressed his approbation of Phinehas, and promised to him and to his seed a special honour and distinction, because he had made an atonement for Israel, and turned away God's wrath from them. It were difficult to conceive a more emphatic intimation than this of God's readiness to forgive. That forgiveness, in respect of the temporal judgments which Israel had brought upon themselves, was necessarily withheld,—the divine mercy was, as it

were, restrained,—until some befitting manifestation was given of the divine rectitude in the punishment of the guilty. But this done, as it was in the punishment of Zimri, the divine compassion flowed forth freely and largely upon Israel,—a new proof was given of the precious truth, that God delighteth in mercy,—the plague was stayed, and a special blessing to himself and to his seed was promised to the man who was instrumental in staying it. Yet all this is but a very faint representation of the blessed effects of Christ's mediatorial work, and of the testimony which it bears to the mercy of God, and his willingness to forgive. Though, as the righteous Lawgiver, he could not compromise the honour, or set aside the requirements of his law, yet, next to the vindication of his own rectitude and truth, that on which he looked with the greatest complacency was the opening up of a channel through which there might flow forth, freely and largely, his forgiving mercy to perishing sinners. If he required that the Saviour of the guilty,—the Surety of those who had not wherewithal to satisfy the demands of the divine law for themselves,—should satisfy these demands for them, by bearing the penalty which they had incurred, it was not because he was unwilling to save them, but because he could not deny himself, by suffering his righteous law to be violated with impunity. The maintenance of his moral government in all its honour and integrity must first be provided for. But that being secured, and secured by a scheme of his own devising, even by giving up his only-begotten and well-beloved Son unto the death,—itself the most marvellous proof of his compassion for sinners,—he was ready to rejoice over sinners to do them good; not only willing, if they would return to him, to receive them graciously, and heal their backslidings, but earnestly entreating them, by every consideration fitted to influence intelligent creatures, to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, and be reconciled to God. The Scriptures are full of such invitations and remonstrances, addressed to every sinner individually who reads or hears them. But never are these proofs of God's willingness to forgive placed in a more affecting light than when he represents Christ's exaltation as the reward of his having made an atonement for sinners, and thereby turned away the divine wrath from them. "Therefore will I divide him a por-

tion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors ;” or, in the words of the passage under consideration, because he “ made an atonement for the children of Israel,” and turned away my wrath from them.

There is still, however, in this passage, another and a very expressive intimation of God’s gracious propension towards sinners, and of the complacency with which he looks on their salvation. We have seen that a special blessing was promised to Phinehas and to his seed after him, “because he was jealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel;” and it is to the nature of the blessing thus promised that I now refer : “ Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace : and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.” That is to say, because Phinehas had turned away the wrath of God from Israel, and had made reconciliation for them, therefore he should have the honour and the privilege of continuing to do so, by having committed to him, as far as it could be committed to a frail and sinful man, the administration of the covenant of peace, the office of the priesthood, in the exercise of which he should stand between the people and God, making atonement for their sins, and offering incense for their acceptance in his sight. It was obviously intended that Phinehas should regard this grant of the priesthood as the highest honour and most valuable privilege which could be conferred on him. It was assumed, as it were, that his highest enjoyment would be the exercise of an office whereby he acted as mediator between God and his brethren, averting from them the divine displeasure, and bringing down upon them the divine blessing ; and in thus rewarding Phinehas, God did, in the most expressive and affecting manner, declare with what satisfaction and complacency he himself regarded the great work of making reconciliation for sinners. How far Phinehas and his successors estimated aright the honour and the privilege thus conferred on them, I cannot tell. But he who alone is absolutely worthy of that honour,—even Christ himself,—fully estimates its value ; for in setting forth his glory as Mediator, it was foretold of him in ancient prophecy that he should be a Priest for ever after the

order of Melchizedek,—even a Priest upon his throne; and when the apostle would convey to us some right conceptions of the glory and honour to which he has been exalted, he tells us that Christ having offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God,—that he is entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,”—and that “he is a merciful and faithful High Priest,” “exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

When the Father, therefore, would reward his only-begotten and well-beloved Son for the accomplishment of the great work which he had given him to do,—when he would confer upon him an honour and a distinction befitting the divine excellence of his character, and worthy of the mighty undertaking in which he had travailed,—he gave to him his covenant of peace, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, that he might exercise the high and holy office of Mediator between God and man, and by his intercession procure spiritual blessings for those whom he has redeemed. And when the Son himself preferred a petition for that which would be to him a full reward of all his agony and toil, that in which he should “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied,” he prayed in these memorable words, “Father, I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do: . . . I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. . . . All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them, . . . Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” And if such be the value which God himself has put on the mediatorial work of Christ, with what profound reverence and admiration does it become us to regard it! And with what gratitude should we not commemorate the death of Him who, because he was jealous for his God, and made an atonement for his people, and turned away the wrath of God from them, has received the covenant of peace, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, that he may be able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them!

LV.

CITIES OF REFUGE.

NUMBERS, XXXV. 9-12.

THE immediate object of the appointment of cities of refuge was obviously to impress the people of Israel with a deep sense of the guilt of murder. At a very early period it had been laid down as a general law, and in very unqualified terms, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;" and great care was taken to enforce this law under the Mosaic dispensation. Not only did it form one of the ten commandments delivered from Mount Sinai, but it was repeated on so many occasions, as well as in such solemn terms, and the violation of it, when not punished by those who were bound to do so, was followed by such judgments, as did very plainly and specially manifest God's holy displeasure with the crime. In this very chapter it is said, "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death. . . . So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it." And, accordingly, one of the most prominent reasons assigned for the judgments which were threatened against Judah was, that "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." But the passage before us places this law for guarding the life of man in a still more striking light. It appears that when a man was put

to death in Israel by open violence, the nearest of kin to the man so slain or murdered was permitted to put the manslayer to death, should it be in his power to do so. Of course, no man was at liberty, on the ground of mere suspicion, to kill any man on the pretext that he had slain his kinsman; for if, on inquiry, it had been found that the person so put to death was not the guilty person, the avenger of blood would himself have been dealt with as a murderer, and would assuredly have suffered the penalty of death. But if it had been found, on the contrary, that a man had slain the murderer of his kinsman, he was liable to no punishment on that account,—that is to say, he was not to be treated as guilty of an offence to be punished by the judges, though, of course, accountable to God for the feelings and motives by which he was actuated in avenging his kinsman's death. But this was not all. Even when a man slew another unawares, without anger or malice, and having no intention or desire to do so, but by accident, as it is commonly expressed, or, as the Bible expresses it, "God delivering him into his hand,"—even in this case, the manslayer, he who thus slew another, was liable to be put to death by the avenger of blood, the nearest of kin to the man whom he slew. The law, indeed, would not have condemned him as a murderer, because the law did not hold such manslaughter as murder. But neither would the law have condemned the avenger of blood, if on meeting the slayer he put him to death. The latter must be made to feel that shedding blood, even unawares, was no light matter, and that though the law did not directly condemn him as a murderer, neither did it provide against his own blood being shed by the hand of man. The only place of safety for him was the city of refuge. Thither he was compelled to betake himself without delay, and at whatever worldly inconvenience. Not only was he obliged to leave behind him all his employments and pursuits, however important, but he was to remain in that city, an exile from his family and his inheritance, it might be during the remainder of his life, for he was to abide therein "unto the death of the high-priest, which was anointed with the holy oil." And the provision on this point was very explicit. "If the slayer," it is said, "shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, . . . and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty

of blood : because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest : but after the death of the high priest, the slayer shall return unto the land of his possession."

Such was the nature and immediate purpose of the city of refuge ; and, viewing it simply in reference to that purpose, nothing could more emphatically mark the holy jealousy with which God watched over the life of man, and guarded against the violent shedding of blood. But the remarkable institution of cities of refuge has usually, and I think truly, been regarded as shadowing forth the far more glorious provision which has been made for the spiritual safety of sinners,—even Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The passage before us can hardly fail, I think, to suggest to any reader various points of resemblance between the condition of the manslayer, in regard to his danger and means of escape, and that which the Scriptures represent as the condition of every man in the sight of God. And to the devout reader, the man who has felt his danger, and seen the way of escape, the institution of which we are speaking will furnish subjects of meditation on which he will find it both encouraging and instructive to dwell. Even if no intimation had been given of there being any thing designedly typical in that institution, he could not read what is here said of it, without being forcibly reminded of much that he has experienced, and on which he can never cease to reflect with admiration and gratitude. But a sufficiently plain intimation, I think, has been given, that such is the practical improvement which it was designed that the Church should make of the recorded appointment of cities of refuge, and of the way in which alone these cities could avail those who betook themselves thither. When John the Baptist saw Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, and said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"—and when the apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, sets forth the "strong consolation" which was provided for those who had fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel,—the allusion in both cases to the city of refuge, to which the manslayer was permitted to flee, is too obvious, I think, to admit of any doubt. And if so,—if the sacred writers had the city of

refuge in their eye when they wrote these words,—words, be it remembered, which were addressed to Jews, to whom, of course, an Old Testament allusion must have been familiar,—then the Holy Spirit himself, who dictated these words, has very plainly intimated that the institution referred to was designed to shadow forth Christ as the refuge of the guilty,—to prefigure Him of whom it was afterwards foretold in prophecy, “A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.” And in this view of it, the passage before us will be found to be rich alike in consolation and instruction.

For, in the first place, the believer will see in the condition of the manslayer, when the dread of the avenger of blood first took possession of his mind, a very striking representation of his own condition when first awakened to the reality of his spiritual danger,—the dread of the wrath to come. To this danger every sinner stands exposed ; but how many are there of whom there is reason to fear that they have never felt, or been seriously convinced of it ! They may have been frequently and solemnly warned of a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. But all such warnings may have passed unheeded ; or if for a time they awakened any misgivings, such misgivings may have been quieted or dismissed by some of the many delusive arguments wherewith men contrive so miserably to deceive themselves. And so it will continue to be, till the Spirit of God himself fastens on the conscience a conviction of guilt, from which the sinner cannot escape. And this may be accomplished either more or less quickly, as it seemeth meet to Him who worketh when and how he will. The conviction of a single sin, as a violation of the holy law of God, and, therefore, deserving his wrath and curse, will be sufficient to break up the false peace in which the sinner was reposing, and to render altogether insipid and unsatisfying those enjoyments with which he was once contented, or in which he at least hoped that, sooner or later, he would find a satisfying good. The state of his mind will then very nearly resemble what we can easily conceive that of the manslayer to have been, when he discovered that he had committed the fatal deed by which he became obnoxious to the avenger of blood. Till that moment he was in peace and safety ; but from that moment he felt that he could not reckon on his life

for an instant,—that there might be but one step between him and death. His former pursuits ceased to interest him ; his wonted enjoyments no longer yielded him any satisfaction. The thought of the city of refuge alone could in any degree allay his fear or awaken his hope.

And so it is with the sinner, when suddenly awakened to a consciousness of guilt and to a sense of danger. So it was with the multitude on the day of Pentecost, when “they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” So it was with the jailor of Philippi, when he “sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And so it has been with many to whom the Word of God has unexpectedly become “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” But whatever be the time and manner in which the Word of God is made effectual for convincing the sinner,—whether it be, as in the cases now referred to, a sudden and unexpected discovery of guilt upon the conscience,—guilt which might formerly be confessed in words, as men are wont to acknowledge that they are sinners, but which was never so felt before,—or whether the conviction has been of slower growth, long resisted, sometimes well-nigh suppressed, but still keeping its hold of the conscience, till finally it obtained the mastery, constraining the sinner to say, What shall I do to be saved?—in whatever way or by whatever process this work has been carried on, the result will be that the sinner will look out for a place of safety. Once convinced that the wrath to come is a great reality, he will begin to inquire whether there is not something more real also in the Gospel than he had before seen, or cared to see in it. Formerly he did not need seriously to inquire for a place of safety, for he did not seriously think himself in danger ; and so long as he could contrive to treat what the Bible says of the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, as if it did not mean what it says, he could have no motive sufficiently strong to engage him in a deep and anxious inquiry as to what the same holy Book has said of a way of escape from that wrath. But feeling that he is assuredly ex-

posed to danger, and knowing not how soon it may overtake him, he will begin to inquire how he may escape; and with something of the feelings with which the manslayer thought of the city of refuge, he will turn his anxious and inquiring thoughts towards the hope set before him in the Gospel.

But, in the second place, the case of the manslayer exemplifies the eagerness with which the convicted sinner betakes or ought to betake himself to the hope thus set before him. It is here said, "Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares." It is here assumed, or taken for granted, that the manslayer would flee to the city of refuge,—that under an alarming sense of danger, he would forget and forsake every thing in order to avail himself of the one only place of safety,—and that whatever sacrifices he might make, or whatever fatigue he might undergo, he would give himself no rest till he had reached the sanctuary which had been provided for him. The language, "Appoint cities of refuge, that the slayer may flee thither," plainly implies that it would be the most lamentable infatuation on his part to delay or neglect to betake himself to his refuge, or to fail to put forth every effort to reach it. Yet there might be some found who were so infatuated as to act otherwise than in the way which a sense of danger, it might be supposed, would constrain them to do. The first alarm being over, they might begin to debate with themselves, whether there was not some other way of escape besides the appointed way. Unwilling to relinquish all the comforts of home, and all the fruits of their inheritance, they might be tempted to try some scheme for their protection without going into a state of exile, the termination of which they could not foresee. For this purpose they might endeavour for a season to conceal themselves from the avenger of blood; or they might entertain the hope, that by some compensation they might disarm his anger and purchase his forgiveness. And even if such hopes proved delusive, and they felt themselves constrained to set out on the way to the city of refuge, they might be so indolent, or allow themselves to be so much engrossed by other objects, as to forget the momentous object of their journey, and so be overtaken before they reached the place of safety. Now, when the Bap-

tist speaks of fleeing from the wrath to come, and when the apostle represents believers as having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel, both take for granted the necessity of immediately coming to Christ. The statements of both imply that till they do so, there can be no safety, and therefore no solid peace; that as the manslayer did not know the instant when the avenger of blood might come upon him, so the sinner knows not how soon and suddenly his day of grace may close; and that if he be really alive to his danger, he will flee to the hope set before him.

Yet even of those who have been under convictions of sin, there may be some who have not so made haste to betake themselves to Christ. While the first alarm of danger lay heavy upon their spirit, and they might be ready to exclaim, "What shall I do?" they might also have been ready to accept of deliverance on any terms whatever; and when they were told that Christ is an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, they might feel willing to put themselves under his protection, and to be saved by him in his own way. But such first convictions do sometimes pass away, and, through the deceitfulness of sin, men find some other way of soothing their fears than that of laying hold of Christ, and unreservedly surrendering themselves to his disposal. The thought, perhaps, occurs to them, Why should I be so much alarmed? I am not worse, at least, whatever better I may be, than others who are living in peace and comfort, and of whom it were very harsh and uncharitable to say that they are not Christians, or to suppose that they may not be saved. By such miserable sophistry men do frequently impose upon themselves in regard to eternity, though, if such reasoning referred to their temporal interests, they would reject it as altogether absurd. Yet it is in this way that convicted sinners do sometimes contrive to make their escape, as they think, from the danger which threatens them, while in reality they are escaping, not from danger, but from their own fear of danger,—the avenger of blood being all the while steadily pursuing his course, unaffected by the dream of safety in which the sinner is reposing.

If again awakened from this dream, and brought anew under convictions of guilt and a sense of danger, he may, per-

haps, endeavour to quiet his fears and escape from the depressing sense of impending judgment, by forsaking some sin, or laying a restraint on some indulgence, in the hope that thereby he may pacify his conscience, just as the manslayer might indulge the hope of bribing the avenger of blood to forego his right of retribution. And when this self-righteous scheme also fails, the sinner may then, as he thinks, betake himself to the hope set before him in the Gospel, and, by acquiescing in the doctrine of a free forgiveness through Christ, and feeling some kind of pleasure or satisfaction in the thought, that the way of escape is so easy as to depend simply on his believing that there is such a way opened up and consecrated by the blood of the cross, may flatter himself that now he is beyond the reach of danger. But all the while, though apparently on the road to the city of refuge, his heart and affections may be placed on the objects which solicit his attention by the way. He may be seeking to unite two incompatible things, the enjoyment of his worldly gratifications, and the security of the refuge which they only can possess who are willing to relinquish every thing else in order to attain to it. And thus, while, in his own estimation, and in the judgment of others, he may be in a fair way to make his escape from the wrath to come, he may be so engrossed with the objects that present themselves on his journey, and so retarded in his progress, as to be overtaken before he reaches the place of safety ;—or, to speak without a figure, he may have a fair profession, a form of godliness, and yet die in his sins, having a name to live, but being in reality spiritually dead. Such cases may, and, I fear, do frequently occur. But the sinner who is really under the convincing and converting power of the Spirit of God will not be diverted from or retarded in his course towards the city of refuge. If for a time he should betake himself to one or other of the subterfuges of which I have been speaking, it will in the end serve only to convince him of the folly of seeking a refuge anywhere else than in Christ. Like the manslayer of old, he will feel that all his plans of escape left him still a prey to the fear of being found out or overtaken by the avenger of blood ; and when his eyes are opened to see the strength and security of that refuge which Christ has prepared and consecrated, he will marvel at his own folly and sin in hav-

ing allowed himself to be diverted from the way that leads to it; he will be ready to sacrifice all that was dear to his corrupt nature, and lay aside every weight that would hinder him from reaching it; he will literally and truly flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him in the Gospel.

And this leads me to observe, in the third place, that the institution of cities of refuge holds out to the convicted and penitent sinners great encouragement and consolation, inasmuch as it shows, in a very emphatic and affecting manner, the gracious provision which has been made for their coming speedily to a place of safety and rest. From the account given in Scripture of the number and localities of these cities, it has been calculated, and I believe accurately, that no man, in any of the tribes of Israel, who fell into the unhappy state of having killed a brother unawares, could be more than half a day's journey from one or other of the cities of refuge. We are told, moreover, by Jewish writers, that provision was made by the public authorities for keeping the roads to these cities in good repair; and that at every place where there might be any doubt or uncertainty as to the road, a signal was erected with the word "refuge" upon it, so that none who needed to flee thither might wander from the right way. I know no reason to doubt this statement. It is in perfect accordance with the gracious spirit of the whole institution. And who can read or hear it without being very forcibly reminded of the freeness of the Gospel,—the unqualified invitation addressed to all, even the guiltiest, to "return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy" on them; "and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The invitations of the Gospel are unencumbered with any conditions of time or place. Not even half a day's journey is necessary for the trembling and penitent sinner to come to Christ. Men, indeed, may, and do very frequently make it a long and wearisome journey between their first apprehension of danger, and their arrival at a place of rest and safety in a simple and unreserved reliance on the righteousness of Christ, and finding in him an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. But this is their own doing. It is no condition of the Gospel that sinners should so toil and labour before they find rest. Christ's words are very unqualified, "Come unto me,"—not to-morrow, or next day,—but

"Come unto me," even now, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is unbelief, or the love of sin, or self-righteousness, that prevents the converted sinner from instantly closing with Christ, and as instantly experiencing joy and peace in believing. And there is danger of his coming at last to rest satisfied in his state of doubt and uncertainty. He may conclude that his condition cannot be unsafe, seeing that he is in anxiety and concern regarding it. He may seem to be on the very point of entering the city of refuge, and yet may not in reality enter, and thus remain exposed to danger, though within reach, so to speak, of a place of safety. Still there is no obstacle in the way of his entering, but what he himself creates. He is personally and affectionately invited to avail himself of the refuge which has been provided. Christ himself, the good Shepherd, is saying to him, "I am the door: by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The invitations and promises of the Gospel are expressed in every possible form, in order to meet every possible doubt which unbelief may suggest; and when the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ presented to him in the promise, he becomes conscious of being in a state of safety,—he has reached and entered the city of refuge,—he dwells "in the secret place of the Most High," and abideth "under the shadow of the Almighty."

But, finally, the subject before us does very emphatically inculcate the necessity, not only of fleeing to and embracing Christ, but of abiding in him. It is said of the manslayer, "If he shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he has fled, and the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill him, he shall not be guilty of blood: because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest." And what is thus figuratively set forth has been taught by our Lord himself in express and very solemn terms, when he saith, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." And of the necessity of

thus abiding in Christ, the apostle was well aware when he said, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And everywhere believers are earnestly exhorted to cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart,—to hold fast the beginning of their confidence, and not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. Nor can the believer's own experience have failed to inculcate this truth. He must be conscious that should he at any time cease to hold fast his hope, his peace and comfort will be broken in upon. He will feel that it is not enough that he should once have fled to the city of refuge, or even that he should have had good ground to believe that he had reached and entered it. His peace of mind and sense of safety will not be restored and maintained by reflecting that once he was in peace and safety. If his peace is to be permanent, he must have the permanent consciousness of abiding in Christ,—of constantly cleaving to him,—habitually living by faith upon him. The warnings of Scripture and his own experience unite in testifying, that he can have no confidence in his own final perseverance, but while he is thus actually abiding in Christ; and that, through the prevalence of sin, he may again be involved in the darkness and distress through which he passed when the dread of the wrath to come first constrained him to look out for a place of safety. It is thus that he is shut up to the necessity of constantly exercising faith in Christ,—giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure. And while he is thus warned of the danger of letting go his confidence, he is abundantly encouraged to hold it fast, by the sure promise of all needful grace and strength. We are here told that the manslayer under the law was restored to his liberty, his immunities, and privileges, by the death of the high priest. The believer sees in this a beautiful illustration of the precious truth that Christ, as the great High Priest of his Church, has procured for his people all the immunities and privileges of the children of God; and this, among other blessings, the gracious indwelling of the

Holy Spirit in their hearts, working in them the work of faith with power, strengthening them with might in the inner man, enabling them to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life. If, therefore, they are exhorted to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, they are encouraged to do so by the assurance, that it is God who worketh in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And having been begotten again "unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," they are strengthened to hold fast this hope by the blessed truth, that the inheritance is reserved in heaven for them who are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

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LVI.

THE PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES.

DEUTERONOMY XVIII. 15-19.

THIS is the second time that Moses, in the course of his farewell address, reminded the Israelites of a very remarkable communication which he had received from God at the giving of the law. In the fifth chapter of this book we find him saying, in reference to the voice of the Lord speaking the ten commandments "out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness," "And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of darkness, . . . that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders ; and ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire : . . . Now therefore why should we die ? for this great fire will consume us : if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. . . . Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say : and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee ; and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me ; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee : they have well said all that they have spoken. . . . Go say to them, Get you into your tents again. But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that

they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it." God was thus pleased to grant them their request, in permitting Moses to act as mediator between Himself and Israel, at the same time expressing his holy approbation of the confession which they made and the petition which they preferred,—namely, the confession of their own unfitness to deal directly with God as the Lawgiver, and the petition that a mediator, even Moses, might be allowed to transact with God for them,—they engaging to hear and do all that this mediator might be commanded to teach them.

There is reason, I think, to believe, that in making this acknowledgment, and in preferring the petition with which it was accompanied, the people of Israel, generally, were anxious only to make their escape from that immediate dealing with God which had filled them with terror and dismay, and that they had obtained all that they wished for when Moses was appointed to confer with God on their behalf, so that the word was not spoken to them any more. There might, however, be some who saw and felt their need of more than a mediator merely for a time, and on that particular occasion,—even of one through whom they might at all times have access to God. At all events, God was graciously pleased, not only to express his approbation of their prayer, but to interpret that prayer very largely, and to answer it in a way and to an extent far beyond what many of them at least had asked or conceived. Not only did God appoint Moses to act as mediator for the time between himself and Israel, as we have seen from the passage already quoted, but we learn from this chapter that he granted their request as if it had comprehended a great deal more than they had expressed,—as if it had extended far beyond the time and the services of Moses. And in doing so he taught them very plainly that they needed, in the way of mediation, what even Moses could not do for them; and he exemplified also the gracious truth, that he was ready to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they could ask or think. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of

the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth ; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

And what, then, was the import of the promise recorded in this passage? On this point we are left in no doubt ; for the apostle Peter, in one of his earliest discourses to his countrymen, thus applied the prediction, when urging them to believe on Christ as the Messiah promised unto the fathers: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Christ then is the subject of the prediction or promise in this passage, and it is in his prophetical character that he is here foretold. We are naturally led, therefore, to consider the nature of the office to which Christ was appointed as the Prophet of his Church, and the way in which he executes or fulfils that office. The term prophet, in its ordinary acceptation, signifies a person divinely qualified and commissioned to foretell future events. This, however, is not the full import of the term, as applied in Scripture either to the holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, or to our Lord himself. God never would communicate to his servants the knowledge of any future event which it was useless to know, or which could only minister to the gratification of idle curiosity. All that he revealed to them must have been such truths or the knowledge of such events as did directly concern

the manifestation of his own glory, and the well-being of those to whom or on whose account they were revealed.

The office of a prophet, therefore, as it has been described and exemplified in Scripture, in the person of Christ, consists in revealing to men the will of God for their salvation ; and such being the nature of that office, it is obviously the first in order which presents itself to our consideration, in taking a view of our Lord's character and work as Mediator. Alienated as mankind are from God, through the ignorance that is in them, the very first step towards their deliverance from that state is the revelation to them of the character and will of God. That deliverance does not consist in a mere judicial act or determination of the Divine Mind, forgiving their sins, and followed up by an exercise of mere power changing their nature, whereby, without any consent or concurrence on their part, they are brought out of a state of guilt and misery, and translated into a state of holy blessedness. Their redemption, indeed, is altogether the doing of the Lord ; their justification is an act of His free grace ; and their sanctification is the work of His Spirit freely imparted to them. But still it is a scheme which addresses itself to their rational nature ; it is fitted to command the assent of their understanding, and to engage the affections of their heart ; and it is in its being made to do so, that the practical application of it, so as to be available for the salvation of sinners, actually consists. In fact, the knowledge of God is represented in Scripture as constituting the true happiness of men, while the misery of their fallen nature is set forth as consisting in ignorance ; and it is obvious, therefore, that an essential part of the Redeemer's work must be to reveal to them the will of God. By the divine will, however, we are not to understand merely a revelation of the character of God as Lawgiver and Judge,—of the relation in which men stand to him in that character,—of the extent of the obedience which his law requires of them,—and of the penalty by which that law has been sanctioned. All this, indeed, is necessary to be known ; and it is by the knowledge and belief of it that sinners are convicted of guilt, and prompted to seek after a way of escape from the condemnation which they have incurred. But it is also and especially the work of Christ, in his prophetic character, to reveal the will or purposes of God in providing

such a way of escape, and it is this view of his office which is directly brought before us in this passage ; for the subject of the confession which Israel made was, that they could not hold direct communication with God as the Lawgiver ; and it was in reply to their own request for a mediator to transact with God for them, that the Lord said, "They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth ; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

In this passage, therefore, as, indeed, everywhere else in Scripture, Christ is set forth as the only medium whereby men can hold any friendly intercourse with God ; and if so, then the execution of his prophetical office is not to be considered as commencing only when he was manifested in the flesh, and personally assumed the character of a public teacher. Whatever be the revelations of grace and mercy which have at any time been vouchsafed to the children of men, they must have come to them through the Eternal Word ; and as many such communications were made long before the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among men, he must be regarded as having commenced the execution of his prophetical office long before he actually appeared in our nature. We find, accordingly, that this is the view which the Scriptures give of the office of Christ as a prophet, and of the manner in which that office has been executed. In the very first intimation that was given of God's gracious purposes to man after his apostacy, Christ, under the name of "the seed of the woman," was the subject of the divine communication ; and in every renewal of that promise which was subsequently made, Christ was still the object to which the faith of the Church was directed. Nor did the connection between Christ and these promises consist merely in his being the subject of every one of them,—the person in whose appearance they were all to receive their fulfilment. It is declared in Scripture concerning the prophets generally, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto the Church, that it was the Spirit of Christ that was in them, and that testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow ; and, in particular cases, we find the revelations made by the prophets expressly ascribed to him.

Of the old world before the flood, which was shut up as in a prison-house under the curse and condemnation of God, and to which Noah was made a preacher of righteousness for the space of an hundred and twenty years, during which he prepared the ark, while God was exercising long-suffering towards the disobedient, we are told that it was Christ who, by the mouth of his servant Noah, preached unto these spirits in prison. When it was said to Moses, for the instruction of the children of Israel, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him,"—it is obviously to Christ that reference is made, inasmuch as he is denominated by the prophet, "the Angel of the covenant,"—and the apostle has declared that Christ went with the Israelites in the wilderness. In like manner, we find the prophets frequently speaking in the name and person of Christ; and so entirely do they identify themselves with him, that they employ, as if applicable to themselves, the very language which he afterwards employed, when he set forth the variety and magnitude of his sufferings, and the consolations which supported him under them,—when he remonstrated with sinners on the guilt and folly of their unbelief,—when he laboured to turn them from lying vanities to the pursuit of the only satisfying good,—and when he unfolded to them his character as the Messiah, or Christ, "anointed" of the Lord "to preach good tidings unto the meek, . . . to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound."

If, indeed, there was under the Old Testament dispensation, not only a type of the Church, but a portion of the Church itself,—a constant succession of believers who lived and died in the faith of a Redeemer to come,—then, from the very nature of the Covenant of Grace, the administration of all that concerned that Church must have been conducted by Christ as the prophet, priest, and king of his people; and the inspired men, therefore, by whom he revealed to the Church the will of God, were not only types of him, but messengers whom he employed to give intimation of his coming, and to reveal so much of his character

and office as to infinite wisdom seemed meet in the meantime to keep alive the faith and the hopes of the children of God. And he has accordingly identified these prophets with himself, not only in appealing to their united testimony in proof of his Messiahship, but in appropriating their language as his own,—thereby virtually declaring that when it was uttered by them, it was in reality He who spoke. And as if to express more emphatically this identity between himself and them,—as if to intimate that he was the source from which had flowed to them all those divine revelations which they had been commissioned to make, he declares of that generation to which he was manifested, and by which he was to be put to death, that in consequence of rejecting him and shedding his blood, the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world should be required at their hand.

But though the execution of Christ's prophetical office may thus be considered as having commenced with the very first intimation of mercy which was made to fallen man, and as having been carried on in all the subsequent communications which were vouchsafed to the Church by the prophets, who were successively raised up for that purpose ; yet the character of Christ as the Prophet of his Church began to be fully unfolded only when He who was the Eternal Word, who had dwelt from the beginning in the bosom of the Father, and by whom alone the Father is revealed, was made flesh, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth. All the communications which had been previously made, and all the institutions which had been appointed,—important and most significant as they were,—were still but so many intimations and types of what was yet to be revealed,—the shadow of better things to come, of which the truth, or reality, or substance was to be found in Christ himself. And in this view of the subject, his prophetical office might be said to commence, when, at his baptism in Jordan, the Spirit was poured out upon him without measure, and he was anointed to preach glad tidings unto the meek.

During all the previous dispensations under which the Church had been placed, a portion of the same Spirit had been imparted to the prophets, who were thereby qualified and commissioned partially to reveal the will of God ; and in virtue of the eternal

covenant by which there had been committed to Christ the ordering of all things which concerned the well-being of those for whom, in the fulness of time, he was to take upon him their nature and die, it was under his administration, as exercising the authority which by that covenant had been secured to him, that this gift of the Spirit was imparted. But he did, in a peculiar manner, begin to exercise his prophetic office, when the Holy Ghost descended upon him in a visible form, and when, in the fulness and power of the Spirit, he entered on his personal, public ministry.

And, accordingly, we find, in the history of that ministry, one continued testimony to the fulfilment in His person of the promise in this passage. To say nothing of the many instances of his appearing in the character of a prophet, in the simplest acceptance of that term, when he foretold future events, not only such as concerned himself personally, as well as his immediate followers, but such also as related both to the Church and the world till his second coming,—to say nothing of these, there was, both in the manner of his teaching, and in the truths which he taught, the most unequivocal evidence that he was the great Prophet that was to come into the world. Unlike the prophets under the Old Testament dispensation, who were wont to begin the communications which they had received with the expression, “Thus saith the Lord,” Christ addressed his hearers in the emphatic and significant words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you,”—words in which he assumed the character, not only of a prophet, but of one who possessed in himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And so manifest was this in his teaching, that it is said of the multitude, the people at large who heard him, that they were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught as one having authority; and even those who were sent to take him returned without effecting their purpose, saying, as their only excuse to those who sent them, and on whom they were dependent for their livelihood, “Never man spake like this man.”

And then with regard to the subject of his teaching, it was indeed a revelation of the will of God for the salvation of sinners. He declared not only that God loved and pitied the world in its lost and miserable estate, but that his own personal appearance was the demonstration and the measure of this love; that he had

come to do the will of his Father, even to seek and to save that which was lost; that he was to accomplish this by giving his life a ransom for them; and that whosoever believed on him should not perish, but should have everlasting life. But without attempting to enumerate the gracious and animating truths which he taught, I would observe, that there was, in his whole life and actions, a revelation of the will and a manifestation of the character of God, which no language could ever have expressed or conveyed; and that in this way, as well as by his doctrine, he did execute the office of a Prophet. In the patient endurance with which he bore the contradiction of sinners against himself,—in the readiness with which he relieved every form and degree of wretchedness, for which his gracious interposition was solicited,—in the unqualified freeness with which he invited all to come to him, whether for bodily relief or spiritual consolation,—and in the meek submission with which he suffered inconceivable agony, in the accomplishment of the work which he had undertaken;—in all this, he has given to our conceptions of the divine forbearance, compassion, and love, a vividness which no verbal communication on the subject could ever have imparted. He has brought these attributes of the divine nature within the sphere, if not of our comprehension, at least of our sympathies. He has given to them all the reality and tenderness, without any thing of the weakness or impurity, of human affections and feelings. He has presented to us God manifest in the flesh, for the very purpose of making himself known to his fallen and guilty creatures, who were alienated from him through ignorance and sin. And he has thus revealed to us, not only the will of the Father, but the Father himself; for he has said, and left it on record, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Such is a very summary view of the manner in which Christ executed the office of a prophet, as foretold in the passage under consideration, during his manifestation in the flesh. But he continues to execute the office still, in his exalted and glorified state. What we have already seen of his doctrine, his life, and his sufferings, has been put on record by his command, and at the dictation of his Spirit. To this he has added a portion of what was taught and written by his holy apostles, whom he qualified and commissioned to unfold more fully the way of salvation

through him. These, with the other Scriptures formerly delivered to the Jews, he has by his overruling providence preserved and put into circulation. And he has ordained, moreover, that there be an order of men whose work it shall be to urge these Scriptures on the attention and acceptance of their fellow-sinners.

Such is the provision which Christ has made for carrying on his work and executing his office as the Prophet of his Church. And is not the fact of his having made such provision itself a most affecting testimony to the willingness with which he undertook, and the faithfulness with which he carries it into execution? This, however, is not the whole of what is implied in his prophetic office; for all this would of itself avail nothing towards the accomplishment of his gracious purpose. Though every man into whose hands the Scriptures have come, sees set before him there a faithful representation of his guilt and misery as a sinner, and, at the same time, a clear revelation of the way of deliverance; though in the character of Christ, as there delineated, he sees God manifest in the flesh, making himself known to sinners in a way of grace and mercy; though he has there a record of the promises, and predictions, and types whereby God did, during a period of four thousand years, gradually unfold his purposes of love towards a sinful world, at last fulfilling them all in the person of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; and though pardon, and acceptance, and eternal life are tendered to him, as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ,—nay, though they are urged on his acceptance by every consideration that is calculated to influence his understanding and to affect his heart;—yet against all this he would assuredly hold out, and, in spite of it all, would remain in a state of alienation from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him. But Christ having undertaken the work of Mediator, there was secured to him by solemn covenant a reward of his work,—and that reward is the salvation of as many as the Father hath given him. There has, therefore, been placed at his disposal, as Mediator, a power adequate to give efficacy to his teaching, so as to quicken those who are dead in trespasses and sins. It is an essential part of his prophetic office to send forth the Holy Spirit to accompany his Word, whereby that Word becomes

“quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ;” and it is not until the Gospel has thus come to sinners, not “in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,” that they are turned “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

Nor is there any thing in this work of the Spirit that does at all supersede the necessity or diminish the importance of his Word. The Spirit’s work consists, not in revealing any new truths, or even in revealing the same truths which are recorded in the Bible without the intervention or instrumentality of the Bible itself, but in opening the understanding to perceive, and the heart to approve and love, what has been taught by Christ himself, and by his holy prophets and apostles. And, accordingly, it will be found that when the teaching of the Spirit does take effect on sinners, their actual experience of it will testify, that it is not an inexplicable impulse of which they can render no account, or the communication to their minds of truths and doctrines of which they had never before heard, but that it is their being led to see the meaning, and feel the importance, and believe the truth of what the Scriptures have revealed, concerning the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. And it is thus that Christ vindicates his office as a Prophet, not only in the case of those to whom his Gospel proves the savour of life unto life, but of those also to whom it proves the savour of death unto death. He has fulfilled the office of a Prophet to all in whose hearing his Gospel is proclaimed, or into whose hands his Word has come, in so far as he has declared to them, in the plainest and most intelligible language, all that it is necessary for them to know ; and has, moreover, assured them, that whosoever believeth what he has so declared shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. If, then, men reject this proposal, and treat these truths with indifference and neglect, there can only remain for them the solemn reckoning of which they are forewarned in this passage : “It shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him ;” or, as it is expressed in the New Testament, “Every soul,

which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

But, on the other hand, how full of consolation and encouragement to believers is the truth, that Christ continues still to execute the office of a Prophet to his Church ! I cannot at present enter at length on this view of the subject ; but I would observe shortly, what it does most nearly concern both the duty and growing sanctification, as well as the comfort of believers, to bear in mind, that the execution of this office is carried on by the instrumentality of the Word,—that it consists, not in occasional communications of spiritual illumination, in which they have nothing more to do than to wait for them, but in a settled order and method of procedure on the part of Christ, which necessarily involves in it a constant and careful attention to that method on their part,—that their duty, as well as their privilege, is to wait on him in the ordinances of his appointment, relying on his promise that he will meet them there,—and that they are to regard all these means as the channels through which he conveys to them the knowledge of the divine will as really as if he did in person execute the office of their teacher. And when they consider, on the one hand, what a depth of wisdom there is in the Word, beyond what they have yet discovered ; and reflect, on the other, that their Teacher is the Author of it all,—that in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,—and that his promise of the Spirit has no limits fixed to it, short of their largest expectations and desires ; oh, how little should every other pursuit appear to them, compared with the pursuit of this heavenly wisdom ! And how earnestly should they seek to have the word of Christ dwelling in them richly in all wisdom, and knowledge, and spiritual understanding, that they may be " filled with all the fulness of God !"

LVII.

CURSE OF HANGING ON A TREE.

DEUTERONOMY XXI, 22, 23.

IT would appear, from the examples recorded in Scripture, that hanging on a tree was not prescribed to the people of Israel as the usual mode of putting a convicted criminal to death. Indeed, there is reason, I think, to believe, that in no instance was it ever employed as a capital punishment,—and that when individuals were so treated, it was after they had been put to death by stoning, or in some other way, and was designed to mark some peculiar enormity in the crime for which they had been condemned. We are told, for example, of the five kings who had combined against Israel on their first entering on Canaan, and whom Joshua discomfited, that he “smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.” In like manner, it is recorded of Rechab and Baanah, that when they murdered Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, who had been proclaimed king of Israel in room of his father, and brought his head to David, thinking to gain the favour of the king and a reward, “David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron.” There are, indeed, other cases mentioned of persons being so treated, of whom it is not said that they had previously been put to death by some other means. Of the king of Ai, who had been one of the earliest and most determined of Joshua’s opponents on entering

Canaan, we are told, that Joshua "hanged him on a tree until even-tide." And at a still earlier period, when Israel sinned in the matter of Baal-peor, the Lord commanded Moses, saying, "Take all the heads of the people," that is, the princes, or chief men, "and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel." But in regard to these cases, there is enough, I think, in the passages where they are recorded to warrant the inference, that they differed not from those already referred to,—that these men, too, had been slain by the sword, or in some other way,—and that it was only after they had been so put to death, that they were subjected to the further ignominy described in the passage before us. But however this may be,—whether hanging on a tree was itself a capital punishment, or was only inflicted after the persons so treated had suffered death otherwise,—the examples of its infliction recorded in Scripture plainly intimate that it was held to be very ignominious, as implying that a peculiar atrocity of guilt attached to the person on whom it was inflicted; and this intimation is expressly and very emphatically confirmed by the declaration in the passage before us, "He that is hanged is accursed of God."

It has been alleged by some, that the punishment here spoken of had been in use among the Egyptians and other nations previously to the time referred to in the passage under review,—that it was inflicted on the basest and most degraded of criminals,—and that there was something in the very nature of the punishment which led men to attach to it the greatest possible ignominy. Certain it is, that at a later period it did prevail among different nations, and was awarded only to those who were esteemed the most debased of men and the most atrocious offenders. But whether there was any thing in the nature of the punishment itself to suggest it as a befitting mode of attaching peculiar ignominy to a criminal, the declaration in the verses we are considering, taken in connection with the instructions which accompanied it, gave to that punishment a depth of ignominy which mere human opinion never could have fixed upon it. It is declared, "He that is hanged is accursed of God," or, "is the curse of God,"—an expression which, whatever be its precise meaning, does at least distinguish this punishment from every

other, and affixes to it a character which could never otherwise have belonged to it. And great light is thrown upon the meaning of this expression by the instructions given to Israel as to the disposal of the person who had been so treated. It was strictly enjoined that his body should not remain all night upon the tree, but that they should in any wise bury him that day,—an injunction which, some have supposed, was laid upon them for the same reason that an offender was to be punished with a limited number of stripes, namely, lest their brother should seem vile unto them.

But the passage under consideration plainly shows that the import of the injunction goes a great deal further than this, if, indeed, it does not convey the very opposite idea; for the reason expressly given for the body not remaining all night upon the tree was, that, being accursed of God, it would defile the land. And what is meant by defiling the land may be gathered from other rules and institutions which were prescribed to Israel. It was declared, for example, that the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land which Israel were to inhabit, had, by their guilty and abominable practices, defiled or polluted the land, so that when the time came for visiting the iniquity thereof upon it, “the land itself vomited out her inhabitants.” In like manner, it was declared that the shedding of blood, as murder or manslaughter, defiled the land, and the land could not be cleansed of the blood that was shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it. From these examples, we are led to infer that such a load of guilt attached to the person who was hanged on a tree, that if the body had remained long before being buried, it would have defiled the whole land.

But a further illustration of the subject may be drawn from other ordinances of the ceremonial law. In the preparation, for example, of the water of purification, by taking a red heifer without spot, having no blemish, and on which the yoke had never come, killing her in the presence of the priest, who was to sprinkle her blood seven times before the tabernacle of the congregation, burning her in his sight, gathering her ashes together, and laying them up in a clean place, to be used in preparing a water for the purifying of the unclean,—in this preparation, every individual of the various persons employed, even the priest him-

self, was thereby defiled, or held to be unclean; evidently on the principle that the animal, though itself clean and without blemish, was to be charged, as it were, with the uncleanness of those on whom the water of purification was to be sprinkled, and whose uncleanness it was to wash away. But this principle is still more clearly brought out in the ordinance respecting the scape-goat on the great day of atonement. Of that ordinance it will be remembered that it was said, "Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send them away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." The scape-goat is thus represented as bearing the iniquities of the people of Israel,—as laden with guilt,—and, consequently, as accursed of God, or charged with the penalty of sin: and, in confirmation of this view, the goat was to be taken away as a polluted thing, from the habitations of men into the wilderness, and he who touched it was defiled, so that he was required to "wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp." When it is said, therefore, that he who was hanged was accursed of God, we are obviously to understand that he was to be held as so laden with guilt, so unclean, as that he required to be removed, because the land was not able to bear him,—or, in other words, lest the curse should come on the inhabitants of the land; and, accordingly, it was commanded that his body should not remain all night upon the tree, but should in any wise be buried that day, that the land might not be defiled, which the Lord their God had given them for an inheritance.

Such appears to be the light in which the Israelites were taught to regard the person who was dealt with as the passage before us describes. But I need hardly remark, that the mere circumstance of a criminal being hanged on a tree, whether previously put to death in some other way or not, could not necessarily and of itself load that individual with greater guilt than he was actually chargeable with, or render him more obnoxious to the curse of God than he would have been, though he had merely

suffered death without any additional ignominy. It is obvious, however, that this ignominy might have been inflicted on men who really were not more guilty than others who were not subjected to it; for it appears that no rule was prescribed to them on the subject, but the judges were left to determine for what crimes and in what circumstances such a punishment was to be awarded. So much so, indeed, was this the case, that the statement in the passage under consideration would seem to be rather a caution against inflicting the ignominy too frequently, than a command to inflict it in any case. "*If* a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou," that is, "*if* thou hang him on a tree, . . . thou shalt in any wise bury him that day." Still, notwithstanding this caution, the ignominy might have been inflicted on one individual who far less deserved it than another on whom it was not inflicted; and we are led, therefore, to the conclusion, that the injunction in the verses before us must have referred to something far more momentous than the mere regulation of the conduct of Israel in the infliction of capital punishment; and that the declaration, "He that is hanged is accursed of God," meant a great deal more than could be ascribed to any individual who might be condemned, in the ordinary course of law among the Israelites, to suffer that ignominy. And so the apostle tells us that it did. He says, what, I apprehend, amounts to a declaration, that the words of the passage we are considering were spoken with a direct reference to Christ; for when he would set forth the ground of our deliverance from the condemnation under which we lay, by the sentence of God's broken and dishonoured law, he refers to the fulfilment in Christ's person of the solemn judgment recorded in the passage before us. "Christ," say he, "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

It is in this, its application to the death of Christ, that we see brought out the true and the full import of the passage under consideration, as well as of the other passages to which I have had occasion to refer. Indeed, it is only as referring to that great event that we can suppose the declaration before us ever to have been made at all; for whatever ignominy men might naturally be inclined to attach to the punishment here spoken of,

there was nothing in it, more than in any other, to render the individual suffering it accursed of God. But viewed in reference to Christ, the passage before us is alike significant and instructive. Considered simply as a prediction of the manner of his death, it cannot fail to strike every one as peculiarly interesting,—as a marvellous illustration of what the apostle calls the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. It was a prediction which required the concurrence of circumstances and events, involving mighty changes and revolutions in the state, not only of the Jews, but of the other nations of the world. Had the former retained their power and independence as a nation, they would have been disposed, even with all their malignity, to have put Jesus to death in some other way than by crucifixion; and of this we have a proof in the various occasions mentioned in the gospel history on which they were ready to stone him. But the power of life and death had passed away from them, in exact accordance with another prophecy; and they were in subjection to another people, among whom crucifixion was a common punishment, inflicted on slaves and the most degraded of men. The Jews, therefore, had thus an opportunity of gratifying their malignity in a way and to an extent which their own law and practice would not have furnished them with; inasmuch as the ignominy attaching to the punishment spoken of in the passage under consideration, and which must have been far more degrading in their eyes than even in that of the Romans, from the light in which they had been taught to regard it,—this ignominy, I say, was inflicted on Jesus while alive, the Jews being forward to disown all pretensions to the power of life and death, that they might the more effectually secure the accomplishment of their malignant purpose against Christ. While the passage before us, therefore, foretold the manner of the Saviour's death, it contained also a prediction of the fearful guilt which Israel did afterwards incur, when they not only denied the Holy One and the Just, but slew and hanged him on a tree,—a punishment which they had been taught from the beginning to regard as not merely the most ignominious in the sight of men, but as involving in it the curse of God. And it was to the passage before us, as prophetic, that the apostle evidently referred when he said to them, in reference to Christ, "Him being delivered by

the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ;” Him “ye slew and hanged on a tree.”

But it is not merely as prophetic that the passage before us is both interesting and instructive. It is a literal statement of a great, a most momentous truth,—the truth set forth by one apostle in connection with the passage before us,—“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ;” and stated by another apostle, in equally explicit terms, when he says,—Christ “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” I have already had occasion to remark, that the mere fact of a criminal having been hanged on a tree could not add to his guilt, or render him more deserving of the curse of God than he was before. But because Christ was actually to bear the curse of God’s broken law, and to bear it in that particular manner, therefore the Church of God were taught to regard those who were so treated as accursed of him, being one intimation, among innumerable others, of the great fundamental principle, that sin not only deserves, but must be actually visited with the wrath and curse of God,—and an intimation also of the precious truth, that this curse was one day to be endured by another in their room. So really and so truly was Christ to bear this curse during the awful season of his crucifixion, that the very outward form of that punishment, upon whomsoever it was inflicted, was held to be accursed. Ignominious as the punishment was in the opinion of men, that constituted but a small part of what was implied in Christ being made a curse for us. True, it was no light matter to be deserted of all,—to be almost universally regarded with loathing and execration,—to be esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, as if he had been the guiltiest of malefactors,—to see in his betrayers and murderers the very people who for ages had, under his administration, been distinguished from every other nation, and to whom he had personally come to fulfil all former promises,—and to be shut out from even one expression of affection and sympathy from the few who witnessed, in silence, and sorrow, and terror, the fearful scene of his crucifixion. To endure all this, aggravated by many circumstances which we cannot enumerate, or perhaps conceive, was no light thing. And so our

Lord himself declared : for we find him saying by the mouth of the Psalmist,—“ Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it ; deliver me, because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour ; mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness : and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none ; and for comforters, but I found none.”

But why was it that the Son of God did thus so earnestly long and look for the sympathy of the children of men ? How came it that He should thus be dependent, so to speak, on that comfort which one human being, however frail and feeble, may minister to another,—the comfort of a tear, a look of tenderness, a single expression of sympathising affection, rendered only the more precious because it is utterly weak and impotent to bring any real relief, but is nevertheless the all which the individual has to give ? How was it possible, that He who had dispensed, with unsparing and untiring liberality, the best and richest blessings, making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk,—preaching at the same time good tidings to the meek, binding up the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound,—how was it possible that he could be in such an extremity of destitution and desertion as to put any value on the sympathy and the powerless pity of the very creatures whom he had himself healed, and blessed, and comforted,—creatures who had nothing to offer but unavailing tears, weeping with him, and weeping also under a sense of their utter incapacity to alleviate his sufferings ? It was because he was forsaken of God ; and in that hour of fearful darkness and desertion, when he saw not the face of his heavenly Father, his holy human soul would have found some relief, some alleviation, some lightening, even in the affectionate sympathy of the humblest of his followers. Before that hour arrived, the very anticipation of it made him sorrowful and very heavy ; and under the pressure of the agony which he then endured, he besought three of his disciples to watch with him, as if the knowledge of their being near him would break somewhat the dreariness of that dismal season during which he conflicted with the powers of darkness. Even in this, he obtained not what he asked. The disciples whom he entreated to watch

with him were found, once and again, sleeping for sorrow. But when the last trial came, he was still more alone; for all his disciples forsook him and fled: and it was then that he felt what he had before expressed by the mouth of the Psalmist,—“I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Then was fulfilled, in all the depth of its awful meaning, the solemn judgment contained in the passage before us,—“He that is hanged is accursed of God.” Then it was that he could say,—“Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.” “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.” And all this, yea, much more than all this, he did emphatically express, when he exclaimed, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

And who, we may be ready to ask, who would have refused or withheld from him, in that hour of his desertion, the tribute at least of their commiseration, the expression of their sympathy,—a sympathy which, however impotent for bringing any relief, he did nevertheless long for, and complained because he found it not? Few, perhaps, of his professed followers would hesitate to say, that if they had witnessed his agony and his death, or had known that he was so forsaken and desolate as to seek for some alleviation of overwhelming suffering in the pity of those who might pity, but could not help him, they would have been ready at all hazards to have offered such comfort as they had. But if they are sincere in this profession, there is not wanting still an opportunity of manifesting their sincerity. True, he no longer needs their sympathy,—he is infinitely removed beyond being affected by any services which they can render him. But if they have any right apprehension either of what he suffered, or of what he suffered for, they will acknowledge that they have as much reason now to weep over the contemplation of these sufferings, as if they had witnessed his agony and his death. If they have received through faith in him the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified,—if they have been redeemed from the curse of the law,—the price of their redemption is the very sufferings over

which they fancy that, if they had witnessed them, they would have shed tears of affectionate sympathy.

And have they not in this consideration a still more powerful reason for mourning over these sufferings than if they had actually witnessed them, but had seen nothing more in them than merely one of their own nature enduring the extremity of mortal agony? Such a spectacle was fitted to awaken the natural sympathy even of the most ferocious and unfeeling of men. But believers must see more, unspeakably more in what Christ endured, than the mere outward infliction of the most cruel torture which human ingenuity could invent. They must perceive that the overwhelming load which he bore, and under which he was ready to sink, was the load of their iniquities, which the Lord made to meet upon him,—the burden of their sins, which he bare in his own body on the tree,—the very curse under which they must have perished for ever. They must perceive, also, that if a great deal has been said in Scripture of the depth and intenseness of the Saviour's sufferings,—if there have been recorded there many of the mysterious expressions of agony to which he gave utterance while under these sufferings,—and if the external circumstances which contributed to aggravate the severity of what he endured have been largely and minutely related,—it is not for the purpose of awakening only those natural feelings of sympathy which such narratives are fitted to excite in the breast of every one who reads them. It is to give them a more profound insight into the evil and deformity of sin,—to convey to them some right apprehension of what was due to them for their sins, and to assure them that all which was needful as an atonement for these sins has been endured by their Substitute,—that he has exhausted the penalty,—that the curse has been removed from them, because it was laid on him,—and that now there is no condemnation to them, seeing they are in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

And with these views of the nature and the object of Christ's sufferings, how much more profound, more permanent, and more influential, must the sorrow of believers be in contemplating these sufferings, than any feeling that could have been awakened by the mere sight of what he actually endured on the

cross ! They must feel as if they had wounded him, for he was wounded for their transgressions ; as if they had bruised him, for he was bruised for their iniquities ; as if they had nailed him to the accursed tree, for it was on their account, and for their sakes, that he was accursed of God. And if thus contemplating his agony and death, they mourn with godly sorrow over their sins, and with affectionate sympathy in all that he endured, he will, though now beyond the need of all sympathy, regard it as he would have done if it had been offered to him in that dark and mysterious hour, when he was constrained to say, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none ; and for comforters, but I found none."

But there is another view of our Lord's sufferings presented by the passage before us, at which I have already hinted, but which it is of great practical moment for believers frequently to contemplate. I refer to the example which he gave of the patient endurance of shame, ignominy, and reproach. The great object, as we have seen, for which Christ died, was to redeem his people from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for them ; and in all the types and predictions whereby it was foretold, as well as in the expositions of the evangelists and apostles by whom the fulfilment of these predictions has been recorded, great care has been taken to assure us that this curse was truly laid upon him, and that he endured it to the uttermost, even until it was exhausted. But for any thing that we can see to the contrary, the penalty incurred by sinners might have been endured, Christ might have poured out his soul an offering for sin, though his death had not been preceded or accompanied with the outward marks of ignominy and shame which did actually accompany it, if so it had seemed meet to infinite wisdom. But Christ foresaw that even his atoning death, fully as it satisfied the demands of the divine law,—yea, largely as it would magnify that law and make it honourable,—would not meet all the necessities of his people's condition. He knew that in a sinful world they must be exposed to manifold trials, and to none more certainly than to reproach for his name's sake, and this in proportion to the closeness with which they resembled, and the steadfastness with which they followed him. He foresaw how much they would thus need, not merely an example to

teach them how, as a matter of duty, it became them to demean themselves under these trials, but such an example as might minister largely to their consolation under them. He consented, therefore, in the counsels of eternal wisdom, and he revealed his purpose from the beginning, not only to die for his people, but to suffer an ignominious death, that he might furnish them the example which they would find to be so needful both for their instruction and their encouragement.

And to the value of this example, Scripture and experience alike bear testimony. How often do we find in the New Testament the shame and reproach which our Lord endured, and the patience with which he bore them, urged upon believers as the consideration which was fitted and ought to be sufficient to reconcile them to similar sufferings! They are not taught to regard such trials as light and trivial, nor are they required to be insensible to their severity. Our Lord himself, as we have seen, did not so regard them; for his holy human soul was keenly alive to their sharpness. But he willingly and patiently endured them all for the glorious object that was before him,—the redemption of his people, and their encouragement and consolation during this their sojourn in a sinful and suffering world; and they are required to suffer patiently in like manner for the object set before them,—the manifestation of the Redeemer's glory here, and the enjoyment of his kingdom hereafter. "Let us lay aside every weight," says the apostle, "and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings:" "for even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

And I need not tell believers, what their own experience testifies, that these are the considerations by which mainly they are reconciled to suffering : for how frequently has the thought of what Christ endured for them suppressed some rising feeling of dissatisfaction or impatience, or has so quickened them to a lively sense of their obligation, that they have felt as if their suffering were alleviated,—as if their burden had become lighter ! And if at any time they are conscious of having been unwilling to endure reproach or ridicule, when a faithful adherence to Christ would have unavoidably subjected them thereto,—if their conscience testifies that they yielded to this fear of man, and, for the time, dealt unfaithfully by the Saviour, and inconsistently with their profession,—it is the thought of what he endured for them that especially aggravates the bitterness of the recollection. There is to believers, therefore, not only a solemn warning, but a most affecting appeal to the heart, in the Saviour's words, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

LVIII.

THE WORD VERY NIGH.

DEUTERONOMY XXX. 11-14.

AT the conclusion of the preceding chapter we find Moses saying, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." This important and instructive truth was introduced by Moses very abruptly, at the close of an enumeration of judgments which he foretold were to come upon Israel in the latter days. These judgments were of such a kind as seemingly to threaten the utter extinction of Israel as a people, and such, therefore, as might appear to be inconsistent with the whole of God's previously revealed purposes concerning them, and with the many promises which he had made unto their fathers. And if so, then Moses could not fail to be deeply affected by the anticipation of the calamities which he was commanded to foretell; and the very abruptness, I think, with which he introduced the words already quoted, plainly shows that his mind was filled with holy reverence and awe in the contemplation of these calamities, and that he sought a refuge for himself and for all believers,—the true Israel,—in the simple but most precious truth, that known unto God are all his works from the beginning,—that however mysterious his procedure may at times appear to be, his people may rest assured that his faithfulness will be vindicated,—that his "counsel standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all

generations,"—and that, therefore, as they have no right, so they do not need, to pry into the secret things which belong only to God, but to rest satisfied with the things which are revealed, and which belong to them and to their children.

And this humble, reverential, and confiding acquiescence in the rectitude and wisdom of the divine appointments was forthwith met by a token of the divine approbation ; for on the principle elsewhere stated in Scripture, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant," Moses was commissioned immediately to follow up his predictions of judgments with such promises of mercy as plainly declared, that, in the divine counsel, provision was made for the fulfilment of the covenant sworn unto Abraham, notwithstanding all the calamities that were to overtake Israel as a nation, in consequence of their backsliding and apostacy. He was commanded to assure the faithful of that time, and of future times, that even after all the things which he foretold had come upon Israel, if they should call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord their God had driven them, and should return unto the Lord their God, and should obey his voice, according to all that Moses commanded them, they and their children, with all their heart, and with all their soul, then the Lord their God would turn their captivity, and have compassion on them, and would return and gather them from all the nations, whither the Lord their God had scattered them ; that even if they had been driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven, from thence would the Lord their God gather them, and from thence would he fetch them ; that he would bring them into the land which their fathers possessed, and they should possess it ; and that he would do them good, and multiply them above their fathers.

Assurance was thus given, that though the overthrow and dispersion of Israel, as previously foretold, might appear to involve irretrievable ruin, rendering their restoration hopeless, yet nothing was impossible with God ; and that, therefore, his believing people might confide in his faithfulness, even in the last and apparently desperate extremity. It was only, indeed, to true believers that these promises could have any reality or any meaning ; for they who despised God's threatenings never could reckon upon or derive any encouragement from the fulfilment

of his promises. But to his own people these promises were exceeding precious. It was by them that their faith and hope were kept alive through many a dreary season of ungodliness and unbelief of Israel at large; and it was in answer to their believing and urgent prayers, pleading his promises, that God remembered his covenant which he had sworn to Abraham, and, in fulfilment of that covenant, made bare his holy arm, to sanctify his great name in the sight of the heathen.

But the promises recorded in the preceding verses of this chapter, and to which I have been referring, are something more than conditional promises,—more than merely an assurance, that if Israel, in their captivity and their dispersion, should bethink themselves, and turn and pray unto God, he would be ready to hear and answer, and would manifest his almighty power in delivering them, however hopeless their condition might appear. Like the threatenings recorded in the preceding chapters, these promises, I think, are predictions,—a prophetic description of what was actually to take place subsequently to the execution of the judgments foretold by Moses. The general tenor of the passage seems to intimate this, inasmuch as their calling to mind, or bethinking themselves in the land of their captivity, and returning unto the Lord their God, is spoken of as a thing that was to happen, not merely as what might possibly take place. “It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, . . . and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, . . . and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, . . . then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee.” But the sixth verse, I apprehend, places it beyond doubt that the chapter before us was prophetic,—that the promises which it contains were not merely conditional promises of what God would do in the event of Israel bethinking themselves, and repenting, but predictions of what God had graciously purposed to do in them, and by them, and for them,—that Moses, in fact, was commissioned to foretell, that though there was but a remnant of Israel that was to escape the judgments which he had previously foretold, yet from that remnant they should grow again, and multiply even more than their fathers. “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy

God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

Here is a prediction, the fulfilment of which was not contingent,—not dependent on any thing in the character and doings of Israel. It was a promise which could only be resolved into the sovereign grace of God,—a promise that he would send forth his Spirit, in his convincing and converting power, whereby to turn Israel from the error of their ways, even the disobedient unto the wisdom of the just. In this promise, therefore, there was nothing conditional depending on Israel themselves. No doubt, the change here foretold was to be brought about by means; and what these means were we are informed in the passage before us. The people of Israel, after experiencing the service of the nations, and after being taught, in their bitter experience, what a miserable exchange they had made of the service of the God of their fathers, for that of gods of wood and stone, would remember why it was that they had been brought into their low and lost estate, and would be at no loss to discover what was the cause of the calamities which had overtaken them. They would see then that there was no need for prying into the secret things which belonged unto the Lord alone, and that had they been satisfied with attending to and improving the things which had been revealed, they had never been brought into the state of exile and of bondage under which they were groaning. They would remember that the commandment which Moses commanded them was not hidden from them, neither was it far off,—that it was not in heaven, among the secret things which belonged unto the Lord, that they should say, "Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?" They would be constrained to acknowledge that it was nigh unto them, in their mouth, and then beginning to be felt in their heart,—in the desire awakened, amidst their destitution and helplessness, to return and do the plainly revealed commandment of Moses, which they had formerly set at nought, in consequence of which they had been cast out of their own land.

Thus convinced that Moses had set before them, as we find him declaring in the following verses, "life and good, and death and evil, . . . blessing and cursing," they would seek to return to God by penitence and faith, if, peradventure, they might yet find mercy

in their guilt and enlargement in their distress. And all this might seem to be the natural effect of the circumstances in which they were placed, where the miseries of their captivity, contrasted with the blessings which they might have been enjoying in the land of Canaan, practically taught them what an evil and bitter thing it was to depart away from the living God. But though such means were to be employed in awakening them to repentance, yet, as in the case of every penitent sinner, it was the agency of the Holy Spirit that wrought in and by these means, so as to produce the happy effect of turning them to God: for without this agency no means would ever have circumcised their heart. The promise, therefore, that their heart should be circumcised was just a revelation of the purpose of God to effect upon them the great work of regeneration; and whatever means might be employed, it was God that wrought that change, when, at the appointed time, he poured "upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

The promise, which we have thus seen to be a prediction, may perhaps appear to have received its fulfilment in the restoration of the Jews after the Babylonish captivity. Previously to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of Judah, unawed and unreclaimed by the overthrow and captivity of Israel, was fast ripening for the judgment which had been predicted by Moses; insomuch that the prophet Isaiah said of it: "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." The judgment, which had lingered long, did at length come. The city of Jerusalem, after a protracted siege, during which the inhabitants suffered not a little of the miseries threatened in the preceding chapters, was broken up by the army of the king of Babylon, who "burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house," and "brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about," and carried away the people captive unto Babylon. To all appearance, there was thus an end of Judah as a nation. But, during the captivity, there were awakened in their minds those feelings of godly sorrow and contrition,—emphatically called in the context the circumcision of the

heart,—together with earnest longings, not only after their return to the land of their fathers, but for the restoration of the house of the Lord in the place which he had chosen to put his name there. In proof and illustration of this, I may refer to the 137th Psalm, to the prayer of Daniel, and to the histories of Ezra and Nehemiah. And the same histories bear ample testimony, also, to the faithfulness of God in fulfilling the promises given by the mouth of his servant Moses; for when the time appointed came, he gave them favour in the sight of those that carried them captive, and turned the hearts of heathen kings, so that they protected and encouraged the people in rebuilding the house of the Lord their God at Jerusalem.

But though the restoration of the Babylonish captivity did, to a certain extent, correspond with the fulfilment of the promises here recorded, and though that event might have been referred to when these promises were given; yet we must come farther down in the history of the Jews if we would see the full accomplishment either of the threatenings or of the promises contained in these chapters. Severe as were the sufferings of that people, both before and during their captivity in Babylon, they still fell very far short of what we find foretold and described by Moses: and the same remark is applicable to the promises; for these were far too large and precious to be exhausted by any thing that was done for Israel at the period referred to.

But there is a later period in that history, sufficiently marked, I think, to satisfy any one that it was the time at which the predictions of Moses in the preceding chapters began to receive their full accomplishment. In the horrors of the last siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, and in the sufferings which the Jews subsequently endured in their state of dispersion, we find the fulfilment, even to the very letter, of the most appalling threatenings which Moses was commanded to denounce, and which we find recorded in the 28th chapter of this Book, as well as in the 26th chapter of Leviticus. But we are informed, at the commencement of this chapter, that the promised interposition on behalf of Israel was to take place after all the threatened evils or curses had come upon them; and, therefore, that interposition is still a future event, inasmuch as Israel are still scattered among the nations. Their condition, indeed, is not what it once

was,—a state of suffering such as no people had ever been subjected to,—suffering corresponding in some measure to the fearful curse which they imprecated upon themselves, when they said of Christ, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

But their hearts have not yet been circumcised to turn unto the Lord, and he has not yet turned their captivity. The promises in this chapter, therefore, refer to Gospel times, and will be fulfilled in regard to the Jews only when “the veil that is upon their heart,” in the reading of Moses, and the other Old Testament scriptures, “shall be taken away;” when Christ shall take to him his great power and reign,—raising up the tribes of Judah, and restoring the desolations of Israel. And so the apostle tells us; for in the 10th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, we find him quoting the passage before us as the language of the Gospel, contrasted with the language of the law, on the subject of man’s salvation,—the righteousness by which the sinner is justified in the sight of God. The man who seeks justification by the law must undertake to satisfy the demands of the law by a perfect unsinning obedience. That righteousness cannot be procured by less than this, and therefore the language in which it speaks is, “The man which doeth those things shall live by them.”

But the righteousness which the Gospel reveals or sets forth is God’s righteousness,—that is, provided by God the Father, wrought out by God the Son, and applied by God the Holy Ghost; and in the Gospel it is presented freely to all, so that they who believe, or accept, and close with the offer become partakers of it, so as to be justified thereby; and the language, therefore, in which this righteousness speaks is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Of the righteousness which is by the law Moses spoke very plainly; for, in delivering the moral law as proclaimed from Mount Sinai, he announced the solemn truth, that they who would seek salvation by works must be prepared to yield a perfect obedience to the law in all its spirituality and rigour, and establish their claim to this perfect righteousness to the satisfaction of the great Lawgiver and Judge. But Moses spoke also of the Gospel and of the righteousness which is of faith,—that is, the perfect righteousness of Christ, which becomes the sinner’s by faith. Moses spoke of this also, not

merely by the institutions or ordinances which he was commissioned to appoint, and in all of which Christ was foretold and prefigured, but also by express predictions, like the other prophets.

And the passage before us is one of these predictions ; for the apostle quotes it as if originally spoken of and mainly referring to the Gospel salvation,—evidently intimating that when Moses wrote these words, he was, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, speaking prophetically of the clearness and of fulness with which salvation was to be revealed by the coming of Christ, the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, and of the freeness with which Christ's righteousness was to be tendered to all, that by faith they might be clothed therewith, and so justified in the sight of God. "Christ," says the apostle, "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above :) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is, the word of faith, which we preach ; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

It appears, then, that the main subject of the passage under consideration is the Gospel,—the word of faith, as the apostle calls it,—the proclamation of "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." When Moses said to the children of Israel, "This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off : . . . but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it," he meant, by the commandment or word, not the law of the ten commandments merely, but the whole system of divine revelation which he had been employed to communicate, and in which Christ and his righteousness were, in various ways, and by very significant symbols, set forth and prefigured. The law, strictly so

called, was the covenant of works, and could furnish no such ground of hope to the sinner as would hold out an inducement to repent and turn unto God. Perfect obedience or eternal death was the only alternative which it could present,—an alternative which left the sinner in a state of utter hopelessness. When Moses, therefore, called Israel to return in penitence to God, or when he foretold that they would so return, he assumed that they would do so in the exercise of faith in that atoning Sacrifice of which they had manifold types in the sacrifices and burnt-offerings of the ceremonial law.

The words of the passage before us, as written by Moses, did thus, in substance, mean the same as when they were quoted by the apostle. In both cases, the all-sufficiency of Christ's righteousness, and the freeness with which it was offered to sinners, was held forth as at once the motive to repent and turn to God, and the ground of their acceptance with him. Neither Israel, indeed, nor even Moses himself could understand so fully, and see so clearly, as we may now do, the import of the great truth announced in the passage before us,—even the nearness of God's righteousness to all who will lay hold upon it, according as it is elsewhere said in ancient prophecy, "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice; for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it." All this, I say, could not be so fully known or so clearly seen by believers in the time of Moses, when the passage we are considering was first recorded, as by the Church in the days of the apostle, when he recorded it anew, with his inspired commentary thereon. This necessarily arose from the manner in which God was pleased to reveal his scheme of redeeming mercy, by gradually unfolding his purpose in a variety of ways, and through many successive generations, till the mystery of godliness was fully revealed in Christ,—God manifest in the flesh. During these previous ages, Christ was seen only in types and promises; and whatever were the peculiar advantages which they enjoyed, in being favoured with more immediate communications from heaven, none can deny that in these last

days of the Church, the privileges of believers, and, consequently, their responsibilities, are incalculably augmented.

This is a practical lesson which should never fail to occur to us, and be seriously pondered, as often as we compare our condition with that of the Church under the old dispensation. But while believers now may see, in the passage before us, much more of Christ and of his righteousness than Israel of old did or could see,—and while we are thus reminded that God has “provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect,”—we are reminded also that there is thereby devolved upon us an obligation in regard to the descendants of Abraham, to the discharge of which we would do well to take heed. Though hitherto they have reaped little advantage from the precious truth recorded in the passage under consideration, and though it may seem to have been written, as it were, exclusively for sinners of the Gentiles, yet let us remember that it was originally written with an immediate view to the people of Israel, to preserve or to recover them from their backsliding. The moment it was addressed to them by Moses, it became one of the revealed things which belonged to them and to their children for ever. They have, therefore, a special, a covenanted interest in that truth,—the truth which brings near to them the righteousness of Christ, that they may be justified before God; and upon us, therefore, who know that truth, there lies an unalterable obligation to seek to make them acquainted with it,—to endeavour to put them in possession of their covenanted inheritance, secured to them by the promise and the oath of the God of their fathers. The Old Testament abounds with great and glorious things spoken of Zion, which, though common to the Church of Christ at large, were spoken with a special reference to Israel, and in the fulfilment of which none can doubt that Israel will occupy a very prominent place.

And how will this fulfilment be accomplished but by the power of the Spirit of God, letting in on their hitherto darkened understandings and alienated hearts the light of the blessed truth in the passage before us? Hitherto they have been looking and longing for the advent of Messiah; from time to time deceived by false Christs and false prophets; and at all times disappointed in their carnal expectations, experiencing the sick-

ness of heart which is the effect of hope deferred. And how fully, then, will all the glorious things spoken of them in Scripture be realised in their experience, when, by the preaching of the Gospel, accompanied by the power of the Spirit, they shall be made to understand the truth in these words: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring down Christ from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) . . . The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, . . . that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Every true believer can, with more or less clearness, conceive of the light, and joy, and gladness which will break in upon Israel, when the veil, which has hitherto blinded them in reading Moses and the Prophets, is taken away from their heart: for every true believer must have derived light, and life, and enlargement of heart, from the precious truth here recorded. Many believers, indeed, will remember, that at one time their spiritual condition did not in reality differ much from that of the people of Israel. They never, perhaps, were chargeable, like the unbelieving Jews, with openly denying that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in Old Testament prophecy. But, with an outward profession of faith in him, they had no more of that saving faith which unites to Christ, pacifies the conscience, purifies the heart, worketh by love, and overcometh the world, than the professedly unbelieving Jews themselves have. Whatever might be the refuge in which they sought to make their escape from the accusations of conscience, and the fears thereby awakened, it was still but a refuge of lies,—an attempt to find rest where the Scriptures expressly assured them that rest was not to be found,—a virtual declaration that they would seek and find salvation in another way than that in which alone God has declared that he will bestow it,—and, therefore, in reality a rejection of his proposal,—an impeachment of his truth. While in this state, the language in which the apostle speaks of the unbelieving Jews, and explains the reason of their continued unbelief, will be found strictly applicable to them: "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the

righteousness of God." They will acknowledge that no terms could more accurately describe their former condition, while yet they had no clear apprehension of the ground on which God justifies the sinner, pardoning and accepting him as righteous. They will confess, too, that all this while they never found the rest which they sought for,—that they were perpetually haunted with the suspicion, that the righteousness which they laboured to establish would not stand the trial to which it was to be subjected on the judgment-day,—and that if for a season they did feel something like confidence and peace, one solemn thought of the holiness and rectitude of God was sufficient to dissipate and destroy it.

And how was it that, after thus labouring in the fire, and wearying themselves for very vanity, they did at last find a solid resting-place? They must be conscious that it was by discovering the meaning of the simple truth, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The moment they made this discovery, they felt that they had all along been saying, "Who shall ascend into heaven, . . . or, Who shall descend into the deep?" to bring me an answer to the solemn question, "What shall I do to be saved?"—while, all the time, the answer to that question was near them, in their mouth, and from that instant in their heart, even the precious declaration, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!" They must recollect, though they might not be very well able to describe, the flood of light which broke in upon their soul, when they thus discovered what a plain and simple thing the Gospel is; and they must remember the lightening of heart, the enlargement of spirit, which they experienced when, utterly renouncing all other confidence, they placed their simple and undivided reliance on the finished work of Christ, as the only, and, at the same time, a sure defence from the wrath to come,—as that alone which stood between them and eternal death.

And if they can call up such recollections regarding their first conversion to God, and remember, at the same time, how frequently the same simple truth has brought them relief and enlargement in seasons of weakness, depression, and doubt, how anxious must they be that others, their perishing fellow-sinners, should be brought to the knowledge of the same truth, and be partakers of the consolation which that truth is fitted

and designed to convey! This concern for the salvation of men will be found to be an infallible consequence of regeneration,—a feeling which true believers can no more cease to cherish than they can cease to feel and acknowledge their obligations to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood. To an ungodly world, the zeal of true Christians for bringing over others to their own views and opinions is altogether inexplicable,—they put it down to the account of hypocrisy, or fanaticism, or even madness, knowing neither what they say nor whereof they affirm. But it is a very plain and a very intelligible thing notwithstanding. True believers have found rest and peace to their own souls in the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and that grace being inexhaustible, they have no motive for grudging the participation by others of the same grace; nay, they feel that their own blessedness would be unspeakably enhanced were all around them partakers of the same blessedness.

And if such be the generous, the charitable feeling awakened towards all, it cannot fail to be particularly strong in regard to the Jews, the descendants of Abraham. The truths from which believers draw no small portion of their own comfort,—as, for example, that in the passage before us,—were originally addressed to Israel; and though, as we have already said, these truths are the common property of all men, and will become saving truths to as many as believe, yet we cannot help feeling that the Jews have something like an hereditary interest in them. And with this feeling, it cannot fail to be the object of our prayers and of our efforts to put them in possession of privileges which sooner or later must be theirs, and theirs in a manner and to an extent in which others do not become partakers of them. And while we recollect how it was that we ourselves emerged from a state of darkness, and doubt, and bondage, into a state of light, and assurance, and liberty, even by the truth recorded in the passage we have been considering, we shall feel irresistibly impelled to embrace every opportunity of urging the same truth upon them: Say not, “Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” or, “Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”

LIX.

GOD'S JEALOUSY FOR HIS NAME THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 26, 27.

AT the 15th verse, Moses had foretold of Israel, that, in the day of their prosperity, when God had blessed them with plenty, and had put the fear of them and the dread of them on all the nations round about, making them to ride on the high places of the earth, they would forsake God which made them, and would lightly esteem the Rock of their salvation,—that they would provoke him to jealousy with strange gods, sacrificing unto devils, and not unto God,—and that of the Rock that begat them they would be unmindful, and would forget God that formed them. And at the 19th verse, Moses proceeded, in the name of God, to predict the terrible consequences of their apostasy, summing up in a few sentences the appalling judgments of which he had before repeatedly forewarned Israel. “And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be. . . . They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; . . . and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people. . . . For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and

with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grey hairs."

And could Israel, then, as a people, survive inflictions like these? After undergoing such desolating judgments, must they not have been so weakened, so utterly wasted, as to be an easy prey to their enemies, who were ever ready to assail them, and who aimed at nothing short of their utter overthrow and destruction? Having, by their grievous backsliding, incurred such a visitation of divine wrath, how was the execution of that wrath to be arrested, before it had made a full end of them, and utterly blotted out their name as a nation from under heaven? There was one consideration which might and which did stay that execution,—the consideration of God's own glory. He had purposed, and he had declared it to be his purpose, to exalt Israel to power, and honour, and greatness, in the sight and for the punishment of the idolatrous nations around them; and that purpose was not to be defeated. Israel, indeed, did all in their power to defeat it,—as if it had been their settled purpose to dishonour God and ruin themselves; and while they did, on many occasions, profane the name of the Lord among the heathen, and give occasion to his enemies to blaspheme, they brought themselves to the very verge of what would have been inevitable destruction, if regard had been had only to their character and doings.

It was as a nation that God had selected and raised them up to be witnesses for him; and it was by their national prosperity and greatness, in spite of the united hostility of an idolatrous world, that he was to assert and demonstrate his supremacy as the living and the true God. If, therefore, they should themselves become idolaters, as it was foreseen and foretold that they would, and if it became necessary for the vindication of his rectitude and justice that God should withdraw from them his protection, leaving them to all the helplessness of their own strength, so that their enemies might triumph over them, then what could we possibly conceive to be the issue but their utter and final extinction as a people? They had failed to serve the end for which God had at first chosen, and subsequently protected,

multiplied, and prospered them; and they were chargeable with all the guilt of defeating a divine purpose, if that had been possible. That this was impossible did in no degree palliate the heinousness and enormity of their sin. But it might prevent their name from being utterly blotted out. Notwithstanding that, for a time, God's purpose did seem to have been defeated, and his great name was profaned among the heathen, all this must have been foreknown to him when he first revealed his purpose to Abraham, and he might overrule it all for the most glorious fulfilment of that purpose. And this, the passage under consideration expressly tells us, was the only ground on which the judgment of God was stayed, before it had utterly consumed them: "I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our high hand, and not the Lord, hath done all this."

The language of the passage before us is very remarkable. The substance of it, indeed, we find frequently elsewhere stated in Scripture, as when it is said, "The Lord is a jealous God,"—"The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God,"—He is "a consuming fire, even a jealous God,"—"I am the Lord; that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." But all this is expressed in the passage we are considering in language peculiarly solemn and emphatic. God there declares that he would have made the remembrance of Israel to cease from among men, were it not that he feared lest the enemy should arrogate to themselves as their doing, and as done in spite of the God of Israel, what he himself did in the way of righteous judgment, so that they would have something like a plausible ground for questioning his supremacy and profaning his great name.

The declaration places the guilt of Israel in a very appalling light, and resolves the preservation of even a remnant of them into the exercise of sovereign grace and mercy on the part of God. But it announces also, and in a very impressive manner, a truth, which it is of the greatest importance that we should constantly bear in mind and reverentially acknowledge,—namely, the great fundamental truth, that the object of all

God's dealings with and about his creatures is the manifestation of his own glory. I have already quoted enough to show that this is the doctrine of Scripture, and I might quote much more to the same effect,—as where it is said, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,"—or, in still more expressive terms, "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."

But while the passage before us states the general truth in sufficiently clear and express terms, it contains also an application of that truth alike solemn and instructive. With regard to the general doctrine, that God made all things for his own glory, none will venture to dispute it who admit that the character and perfections of God are such as the Scriptures represent them to be. From the very nature of God, it cannot be but that his own glory must be the great object of all his plans and doings. Possessed in himself of all excellence and perfection, he would have been for ever, as he has been from all eternity, unchangeably blessed, even though he had never, by his almighty power, called one creature into existence. And if he was pleased to exercise his power and wisdom in the creation of the universe, he would have rested with ineffable satisfaction on that exercise of his adorable perfections, though, among all his works, there had not been one intelligent creature to contemplate and admire them. In his own eye they would still have been good.

But if, with his other works,—if, besides innumerable orders of sentient beings, in whose existence, though they are void of understanding, there is nevertheless an amount of enjoyment which, in our apprehension of things, is absolutely infinite,—if, besides these, he did create intelligent beings, capable of perceiving, admiring, and adoring his perfections as thus manifested in his works,—his own glory, the display of his own divine excellence, for their devout contemplation, must have been the great end of their creation. How great and glorious soever any of his creatures may be, there could be no object so worthy of the exercise of all their powers and faculties as this devout, adoring contemplation of the character and perfections of

their Creator. The manifestations of his own glory is the greatest of all ends which God can propose,—and, therefore, must be the end of all his purposes and works. He cannot deny himself. He cannot admit that any thing else is greater and worthier as an end than this display of his glory ; for it would not be true. And as it is the worthiest of all ends in itself, so it is the most beneficent as it regards his creatures. For the glory of his goodness, the manifestation of his beneficence, as well as of his power and wisdom, he has created, and he continues to preserve countless multitudes of living creatures, the amount of whose enjoyment, as I have already remarked, it is impossible for us to calculate.

And with regard to his intelligent creatures, did they seek God's glory as their chief end,—did they think and feel concerning him as his divine excellence deserves,—did they pay to him that homage of admiration, love, and gratitude which is supremely due to him,—and were it their concern to set forth his glorious perfections to the admiration of others ;—if this were the great end which God's intelligent creatures constantly seek, they would find that in pursuing this they gained another end also,—that of enjoying happiness to the largest extent of which their nature is capable. Such is the state and character of holy, unfallen creatures,—the angels of God “ that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word,” —his ministers “ that do his pleasure.” And such also was man in his state of innocence, when he was made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator, and when God pronounced him to be “ very good.”

All this will, perhaps, be very readily admitted in regard to man as he was originally made. But the fall of man could make no change in the great end which God proposed to himself in all his plans. That end must still be the manifestation of his own glory, though to fallen and sinful creatures this truth, in some of its applications, will be found to be very humbling. But it is on this very account that the doctrine ought to be frequently, nay constantly recognised, as a doctrine which, if really believed, will be felt to be salutary in proportion as it is humbling. And the doctrine meets us in the very announcement of God's gracious plan for the salvation of sinners. That plan could not originate in any claim which man as a fallen creature had on the forbear-

ance or mercy of God. The solemn threatening, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," became a sentence of condemnation the moment that man did eat; and to say, therefore, that he had any claim on divine mercy, any right to expect that there would be an interposition on his behalf, would in reality be to say that the sentence which had passed upon him was unreasonably severe,—that is, unjust. He had forfeited the favour of God as entirely as Israel are represented in the passage before us to have forfeited the possession of Canaan, when God declared that if he had regarded only what they deserved, and what was justly due to them, he would have made the remembrance of them to cease from among men. And so, if God had had regard only to what man became, and what was righteously due to him in consequence of the fall, the judgment which had been pronounced upon him must have been executed, and he must have perished without hope. If a purpose of mercy was entertained toward him, it must have been because that purpose, when carried into effect, was to subserve the greatest of all ends, the advancement of God's glory.

And so it was plainly intimated to our first parents. No direct promise was made to them. On the contrary, all that was addressed to them was of the nature of a curse, announcing the bitter fruits which they were to reap from their disobedience. The intimation which they received of God's gracious purpose towards them was conveyed in the judgment passed upon the tempter. He had seduced them into apostacy, and, by doing so, seemed to have defeated the great design of their creation. The honour of God, therefore, his supremacy as Creator and Ruler, and his glory as manifested in the creation of man in his own image, were concerned; and these he chose to vindicate by the execution of judgment on the adversary who had dared to set himself in opposition to God's wise and beneficent designs. And this judgment was such as not only to inflict the severest retribution on the tempter, but also to deliver the helpless victims of his mysterious power and cunning,—thereby overruling the very success of his malignant device for a far more striking manifestation of the divine glory than could have been exhibited even if the order and beauty of the moral creation had never been disturbed or marred,—even a manifestation of grace, and love,

and mercy, infinitely transcending any thing that creation, with all its beneficence, ever exhibited. The seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head, or, in other words, "the Son of God was" to be "manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." But in all this man had nothing to do. He was under sentence of condemnation pronounced by the righteous Lawgiver and Judge; and if regard, therefore, had been had only to his character and condition, nothing could have prevented or even delayed the execution of that sentence. If it was delayed, and if provision was made for setting sinners free from it altogether, it was on a principle similar to that stated in the passage under review,—the consideration of God's own glory, the glory of his unmerited grace, and love, and mercy.

Now, all this is professedly admitted by every man who professedly believes that God has set forth his Son "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but the name of Jesus, and that this gift of his Son is the measure of his love for sinners. But I fear that while it is admitted as an abstract truth, it is not always acquiesced in by the heart. Men are not willing to believe that no regard whatever was had to any thing in them, either in the original purpose of the plan of salvation, or in the application of that salvation to them personally. They might not be able, perhaps, to make out, even plausibly to themselves, any ground on which man as a fallen creature could claim or expect from God a favourable consideration of his case; and they might find it equally difficult to point to any thing in themselves of which they would venture to say, that it ought to have some weight in determining whether they personally shall be partakers in the salvation which has been wrought out for sinners. But there will be a secret unwillingness to yield themselves to the thorough, unqualified, and heart-felt conviction, that neither the plan of redemption itself, nor the application of the benefits of that redemption to them personally, did at all depend on any claim which they had on the favour or forbearance of God;—that, on the contrary, if their character and condition had alone been taken into consideration, one course only could have been followed in regard to them,—namely, the execution of the sentence, "Thou shalt surely die;"—

and that the scheme of salvation, therefore, is to be resolved altogether into the regard which God had for the manifestation of his own glory, in the riches of his grace and mercy.

This is a view of the absolute sovereignty of God which is very offensive to the natural man, and against which the self-righteousness of the unrenewed heart will maintain a stout and determined resistance. But till that sovereignty be really admitted and felt, there will be no right sense of men's guilt, and misery, and helplessness, nor any clear and lively apprehension of the value of Christ's mediatorial work ; and where that sovereignty is fully and unreservedly acknowledged, there also will Christ be cordially embraced by sinners as all their righteousness, and all their salvation.

A regard for his own glory, then, was the great end of that marvellous plan which God devised for the salvation of sinners. And it is with a view to the same end that he continues to carry on that plan, and to apply the benefits of Christ's redemption to the successive generations of his elect people. Were it not that his own glory is thus inseparably connected with the execution of his declared purpose of saving those whom he gave to his Son to redeem, the exercise of his forbearance and mercy towards the children of men had long ago come to an end ; for since the fall, what has this world presented but one great combination of resistance to the will, and hostility to the holy and righteous government of God ?

Of the great mass of mankind in every age, this is too obviously true to be disputed ; and with regard to those who may seem to have been exceptions, and who showed by their life that the fear of God was in their heart, and that they honestly endeavoured to have their will resolved into His will, they have uniformly acknowledged that originally they were no exceptions to the general truth that men are "alienated from the life of God," and are "enemies" to him "in their mind by wicked works." The universal testimony of such men,—and the holier the men the more full and explicit the testimony,—has been, that if they were detached from the ungodly combination of the whole fallen family of Adam against the authority and government of their Creator, it was by the operation of a power which, instead of co-operating with or aiding, they did obstinately resist,—a

power, therefore, which must have been put forth according to the sovereign good pleasure of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

The forbearance and mercy, then, which God has exercised towards the whole race of mankind, ever since the fall, must be ascribed to something altogether apart from men themselves, inasmuch as there was nothing in them which did not stand opposed to and forbid such forbearance. The very exercise of that forbearance, and the very means which he employed to convince them of his willingness to reconcile them to himself, were met on their part with the most daring defiance and contempt. Witness God's dealings with the old world before the flood,—with the descendants of Noah, who speedily lapsed into idolatry,—with the family of Abraham till the captivity of Babylon,—with the same people, when God sent his own Son to tabernacle among them,—and with other nations among whom his Gospel has been despised, or treated with the most determined hostility.

That God should thus have continued to strive with men, to maintain, if I may use the expression, a conflict of patient endurance with his guilty and obstinately rebellious creatures, may, indeed, well fill us with amazement. Had he dealt with them as a regard to their character merely would have required him to deal, he had long ere this terminated the conflict in the utter destruction of our race. Even in regard to those who, in every successive age of the world, have constituted the Church,—those whom he purposed to subdue, and make a willing people in the day of his power, and whose enmity was slain by that power,—even in regard to them, who can conceive of the waywardness, and folly, and resistance which he has endured at their hand, and which, but for a regard to the praise of the glory of his grace, in the fulfilment of his gracious purpose, must have provoked him to cast them off, and leave them to reap the fruits of their own infatuation? We greatly mistake, if we suppose that the language of the passage before us was applicable only to that generation of the people of Israel of whom it was spoken. The visible Church in every age has had within itself enough of impurity and unfaithfulness to require a very large exercise of forbearance and long-suffering on the part of God; and were its own character alone to be considered in determining his pro-

cedure towards it, he would be ready to say, "I will make the remembrance of them to cease from among men."

And none will be readier to acknowledge this than they who have really known the grace of God in truth. They, indeed, can alone entertain any right apprehension of the divine forbearance and long-suffering, because they only have any true sense of the evil and deformity of sin, especially of the sins of God's own people,—those whom he has laid under such overwhelming obligations. It will never cease to be with them a subject of devout wonder that they were not cut down in the days of their ungodliness, when they were indeed cumberers of the ground, unfruitful, or fruitful only in what was poisonous to others, as well as to themselves.

But they will wonder also when they think of what God has endured at their hand, in the way of ingratitude, forgetfulness of him, and unprofitableness in his service, since they had ground to hope and believe that they have become partakers of the grace of the Gospel. If it was of God's sovereign good pleasure that they were separated from an ungodly world, and called into the fellowship of his Son, they will acknowledge that to the same sovereign grace they owe it if they are still in the enjoyment of that fellowship. Not only are they conscious that but for this grace they would have forgotten God more frequently, and departed from him much farther than they have done, even to making shipwreck altogether of faith and a good conscience; but they will acknowledge, that if their continuing to possess an interest in Christ's salvation were to depend on their own strength and steadfastness, they could have no hope,—nay, that they have already done and are daily doing more than enough to forfeit and lose it. They will willingly admit, for it is their consolation to believe, that if they have been brought into a state of grace, they are kept in that state by the power of God. The exercise of this power upon and towards them they will trace to the gracious purpose which God in his sovereign good pleasure formed concerning them, and the execution of which he has inseparably connected with the manifestation of his own glory; and, in the language addressed to Israel of old, they will hear God speaking to them, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

It appears, then, that if the salvation of the Church collectively, and of each member thereof individually be secured, it is only because God's glory is concerned therein. But what a perfect security is this! and how full of encouragement and consolation to believers! And how utterly hopeless were their condition if they had not this security! Even with all the encouragement which the unchangeableness of God's gracious purpose is fitted to afford them, they feel that their conflict with unbelief and corruption within, and with the world and Satan without, is often a very painful and depressing one; and if the issue of that conflict were to depend on the strength of their own resolutions and efforts, or if it were left in such a state of uncertainty as it would be, if no explicit promise, or only a conditional promise, of needful strength were given, it would very soon be abandoned as altogether hopeless. It is the sure and solid hope of a final victory over sin that will alone animate believers in aiming, with any firm and determined purpose, at universal holiness of heart and life. Without such a hope, all their resistance to sin will be feeble and fluctuating, and, in the end, would be given up as useless.

And what a miserable state would theirs be, if convinced, on the one hand, that they must be holy if ever they are to be happy, but conscious, on the other, that to this holiness they never will attain by any effort of their own! But they are not left to carry on a warfare so hopeless. If, in the fulfilment of his own purpose of sovereign grace, and for the manifestation of his own glory, God had by his Holy Spirit called them to the knowledge and faith of the Gospel, so that they were justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, then the same purpose provided, and the same manifestation of his glory required, that they should be sanctified also, being "predestinated unto the adoption of children," "to be conformed to the image of his Son." This is the great truth which furnishes at once the most powerful motive and the most animating encouragement to believers to maintain their conflict with sin,—to "fight the good fight of faith," and to "lay hold on eternal life." It is by the holiness of their life,—their resemblance to Christ,—that they are especially to glorify God; and God's glory being concerned therein, he will assuredly supply them with the grace

and strength needful for the fulfilment of his own great end and purpose.

And this also is the foundation of the believer's hope, and the source of his consolation respecting the continued spread of the Gospel, notwithstanding of the manifold, and, at times, apparently insurmountable obstacles which oppose its progress. There have been, and there may yet be, times in the history of the Church when, to all human appearance, the great work of gathering in those that shall be saved is arrested or at an end,—times when the labours of God's servants, instead of being effectual for the conviction and conversion of sinners, serve only to awaken into more active hostility the enmity of the carnal mind against God,—times when the religion that does exist is but a cold formality,—a formality which, on the part of those who make any profession at all, seems as if they thought that they were doing God honour by deigning, even outwardly, to recognise his institutions, and to observe them ; and when a lawless indulgence in all that is most debasing to human nature is fearfully increasing, and, to all appearance, sealing the doom of multitudes by placing them beyond the reach of conviction or improvement.

At such times, the hearts of God's messengers, the preachers of the Gospel, are ready to fail and be discouraged. They will be disposed to ask themselves, How are we to reach the conscience of the proud and self-righteous formalist, who thinks that he honours the Gospel when he deigns to appear, with an outwardly devout demeanour, in the place where its ordinances are observed ? And, on the other hand, how shall we contrive to gain even the attention of the countless and daily increasing multitudes of the miserable victims of the lowest and most degrading profligacy, so as to have an opportunity of telling them that they have souls to be saved, and that if they die in their present state, they must perish for ever ? The encouragement needful to animate them to renewed efforts in such circumstances is the great truth, that God's glory is identified with the salvation of sinners, and that they who are the objects of his grace and mercy must and will be gathered in. The preacher of the Gospel knows not who they are. But every time that he is called to proclaim the truth to his fellow-sinners, there may be some, for any thing he knows, many before him, who are included in God's purpose of

grace and mercy,—and, moreover, the truth which he states may be the destined means by which sinners who are yet unconverted are to be effectually called.

And can he ask or expect greater encouragement than this? Nor is this encouragement confined to those only who are called to preach the Gospel. The passage before us holds out to all believers the most animating assurance that they, too, may be fellow-workers with God in the gathering in of those who are to be saved; for why is it that he speaks in such strong language of his jealousy for his own glory, but that he may stir up his people to plead with him for the fulfilment of those promises whereby he is especially to be glorified? There are examples recorded in Scripture of the power and prevalence of such prayers in arresting and even averting the judgments which were ready to be executed on Israel; and such prayers, when offered in simplicity and godly sincerity, from hearts warm with zeal for God's glory, will be heard still; for it is his own command, "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

LX.

THE NATIONS CALLED TO SHARE IN THE CHURCH'S JOY.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 43.

THESE are the concluding words of the song which Moses was commanded to teach Israel, that it might be a standing witness against them in the event of their forsaking God and breaking his covenant. Like the rest of the song, the passage before us is prophetic, referring to the latter days, even to the final issue of all the divine dealings with Israel, both of judgment and of mercy, as foretold in the preceding verses. But the words, it will be observed, are addressed, not to Israel, but to the nations, the enemies of Israel, through whose instrumentality God was to execute the judgments threatened in this song. And they are words at once of invitation and of warning. These nations are invited or called to rejoice with God's people,—an invitation which necessarily implies that there was to be opened to them a door of admission into the Church, into a participation in all the privileges and blessings which had been secured by covenant to the spiritual seed of Abraham. And this invitation or call is enforced by the solemn warning, that if they refused to acquiesce in the gracious proposal of being incorporated with God's people, rejoicing in their deliverance, and partaking in their privileges, they must have their share in those judgments which would assuredly come upon the earth, when God should avenge the blood of his servants and render vengeance to his adversaries. That there should be the blood of God's servants to be

avenged, implies that the threatenings denounced against Israel in this song were to be executed, and that, too, by the hands of the heathen nations. For a season, the people of God were to be subjected to these nations, vanquished in battle, and brought into captivity; and their enemies might be disposed to say, "Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this." So it was at the captivity of Israel by Assyria, and of Judah by the king of Babylon; and so it was also at the commencement of the present dispersion of the Jews.

The nations might thus conclude that the God of Israel was no better than their gods; and, for a time, God was patiently to endure this reproach of the enemy. He never, indeed, left himself without a witness, even during those periods in the history of his people when he seemed to be unable to protect and deliver them, or when, to all appearance, he had forgotten the covenant which he swore unto their fathers. The place to which he exalted and in which he established his servant Daniel, in the courts of successive kings of Babylon and Persia, was enough to fill, as it did fill, the minds of these monarchs with something like awe and dread of Daniel's God; and the history of Mordecai might have convinced the numerous provinces which constituted the mighty empire of Ahasuerus, that the Jews, even in their degraded and despised condition, were under the protection of a power which it was alike vain and perilous to resist.

Still, however, the people of God were in a state of dispersion and captivity; and notwithstanding occasional intimations of a divine power being still exercised on their behalf, the nations might triumph, as if they had finally and for ever vanquished Israel. But it was not always to be so. God's covenant with Abraham could not fail; and his faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God was to be only the more gloriously displayed by his seeming slackness in the fulfilment of his promise,—his apparent relinquishment of the purpose for which Israel had been chosen and called. And for the comfort of the true Israel, the remnant of Abraham's spiritual seed, in that and in every subsequent age, Moses was commanded to close this song with a prediction to that effect. And the prediction is delivered in a peculiarly emphatic and expressive manner. Having warned Israel of the judgments which would certainly overtake them, he turns to the

nations, and addresses them also in the language of warning, telling them that though the day of retribution was long delayed, it would assuredly come,—that God was very sore displeased with them, because they had helped on the affliction of his people,—and that he would speak to them in wrath, “and vex them in his sore displeasure.”

This threatened vengeance on the nations involved, of course, an indirect promise of deliverance to Israel. But its very indirectness, in being addressed not to them, but to the heathen, was fitted at once to humble them, and, at the same time, to convey a stronger assurance that the promise would be fulfilled. It plainly intimated, that it was for no righteousness of theirs that God was to interpose, but for his own glory,—the vindication of his truth,—the assertion of his supremacy; and that he could no more fail, therefore, so to interpose, than he could deny himself. It was virtually saying to them, as he said at a later period by the mouth of his prophet, “I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.” “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.”

The passage before us, then, in so far as it threatens judgment on God’s adversaries, the oppressors of his people, and announces deliverance for that people themselves, is obviously prophetic,—foretelling what was to befall both Israel and the nations in the latter days. But the first clause of the verse before us, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people,” though expressed in the form of a call or exhortation, is also prophetic, intimating not merely that there was to be a way opened up whereby the nations might enter into covenant with God, and participate in all the privileges of Israel, but that many of them would actually be put in possession of these privileges, and be enabled to rejoice with God’s people, and to be glad with his inheritance. For this view of the passage we have the authority of the apostle; for in the 15th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, we find him quoting the words before us, along with other passages of the Old Testament Scriptures, as a promise or prediction of the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith

of the Gospel, and as partly fulfilled in the success which had been vouchsafed to his own ministry as the apostle of the Gentiles. It is true, indeed, that large as was the apostle's success, and numerous as have been the triumphs of the Gospel among Gentile nations since his time, the prediction in the passage before us has not yet been accomplished in the full extent of its meaning. But neither has the prediction in the last clause of the verse before us, wherein God promised to be merciful to his land and to his people; for though, on various occasions, subsequent to the time of Moses, God did graciously interpose on behalf of his desolated land and his oppressed people, yet in none of all these cases, not even in the restoration of captive Judah, was there any such ingathering of the Gentiles into the Jewish Church as is plainly foretold in the words before us.

But these two events,—that foretold in the first clause of the verse under consideration regarding the nations, and that in the last clause respecting the Jews,—are evidently to be fulfilled together. Both, therefore, are still future. They form, in fact, one great and manifest interposition of divine power, whereby there will be fulfilled, in all its extent, the promise given to Abraham, that his seed should possess the gate of his enemies,—not in the sense of a worldly conquest over the nations, but as instruments in bringing them to the faith and obedience of the truth. And this we find explicitly declared by the apostle in the 11th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, where, speaking of the rejection of Christ by the Jews, in consequence of which the apostles were commanded to turn to the Gentiles, so that the unbelief of Israel was the immediate cause of the Gospel being proclaimed to other nations, he goes on to say, “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” When God, therefore, shall again “be merciful unto his land, and to his people,”—to the land in which for ages he made so many bright displays of his glory, and where he did “in very deed dwell with men on the earth,”—and to the people for whom he did so often make bare his holy arm, and who, though they have long been and still are enemies,

are nevertheless "beloved for the fathers' sakes,"—when he shall again visit and redeem Israel, the nations also will be made to rejoice with his people. The passage before us, it is true, speaks of that time as a time also of judgment, when the Lord "will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries;" and we cannot doubt that as there has been, on all past occasions of remarkable interpositions of God on behalf of his people, and for the furtherance of his own cause, so in the restoration of Israel there will be, opposition to the fulfilment of his purposes,—such opposition as will bring down upon his enemies the execution of his righteous judgments. The general tenor of Scripture prophecy on the subject would lead us to conclude that the Lord has a controversy with the nations on account of his ancient people,—that the day of reckoning will come,—and that the restoration of Israel, like the rebuilding of Jerusalem of old, will be "in troublous times." But we have also the sure word of prophecy, that the same event will be accompanied with results far more glorious than the mere overthrow of adversaries, even the conversion of adversaries into friends; when "there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord;"—when "ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." Then will be fulfilled the prediction in the passage before us, "Rejoice, O ye nations with his people."

It is plain, I think, that the prediction before us refers especially to the conversion of the Jews as a people, and to the immediate effects of that event on those nations who may be more immediately concerned in it,—the infliction of righteous judgment on some, but the conversion of many more to the faith and obedience of the Gospel. The passage under consideration is one of manifold Scriptures which, it appears to me, cannot be fulfilled by any event short of this. But neither is its meaning fully exhausted even by its application to Israel. The promise which it

holds out is the property of the Church universal, recorded for the encouragement of God's people of all times; and the exhortation or warning which it contains is addressed, in like manner, to the nations of the earth,—the world in every age. The separation of Israel from the idolatrous nations around them was typical of the separation of the true Church, the great body of believers, from the world, the great body of unbelievers; and the separation in the latter case,—I mean, between the Church and the world,—though not so clearly marked outwardly, is not less real than it was between Israel and the nations. The purpose, too, of the separation is the same in both cases. It was God's purpose, in regard to Israel, that they should be to him for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory, that in them and by them he might be revealed to all men as the one only living and true God; and if the whole people of Israel, throughout all their successive generations, had been true believers, they would have exhibited, even to the eye of sense, the real and true distinction between the Church and the world. But being chosen in their national capacity, there were among them unbelievers as well as believers,—the former being frequently, perhaps always by far, the majority; and, therefore, they did but typically set forth the real distinction which has in all ages subsisted between the Church and the world.

But that distinction between the true Church,—the body of Christ,—and a world lying in sin, though clearly discerned only by Him who sees the heart, and knows its thoughts afar off, is nevertheless real, as well as sufficiently palpable to give all men to know that such a distinction exists. And the separation is made for the same purpose that Israel were separated from the nations,—namely, that the Church, the whole body of true believers, may, in every successive age, be to God for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory. Of this his purpose God has given the plainest and most solemn intimation to all men in his Word. The whole Scriptures bear witness to it, for every thing revealed there plainly intimates that the great and ultimate object of all the divine dispensations, in so far as men are concerned, is the accomplishment of God's plan of redemption,—the ingathering of those whom he has destined to eternal life into a state of reconciliation with himself,—and the perfect-

ing of that which concerneth them, in their preparation, by the discipline of his providence and the means of his grace, for the inheritance of glory, to the hope of which they have been begotten again. The whole series of events as recorded in Scripture, throughout many generations, and involving changes and revolutions in the mightiest kingdoms, had all a reference to the Church, the people of God, their present or their future interests; and, in like manner, the whole series of events foretold in prophecy,—events most momentous, as affecting the whole human race, and extending downwards to the consummation of all things,—are predicted in connection with and on account of the Church, as the chief object to which all God's providential dealings with men have respect, and to whose interests all will ultimately be rendered subservient. In proof of this, it is not necessary to enter on a detailed examination of Scripture. It is enough to refer to the most astonishing of all events,—an event compared with which every thing else in the history of the human race, or within the range of human knowledge and observation, is a matter of trivial importance,—I mean, the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, and the purpose for which he was so manifested. He came, we are told, “to seek and to save that which was lost;” and though by multitudes he was, and still is, and will yet be, despised and rejected, he was contented to die for those whom the Father had given him, knowing that they would come to him, and that in their salvation he would see of the travail of his soul and should be satisfied. For them, accordingly, he laid down his life,—for them he makes intercession,—and on their behalf he has been invested as Mediator with all power in heaven and on earth. “Christ,” we are told, “loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” “I pray for them,” said our Lord, in the days of his flesh, referring to his disciples,—“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine;”—“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” And, in accordance with this prayer, we are assured that the

Father hath set Christ "at his own right hand, . . . and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Wherever, then, these truths are proclaimed, God declares that the grand object of his providential government is to establish his kingdom of grace,—to render all things subservient to the accomplishment of the purpose for which Christ died,—to give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. And as the Gospel offers freely to all the benefits of Christ's salvation, all to whom it is preached are addressed in the language of the passage before us, "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people."

To those who really believe the Gospel all this must be very obvious. All the other events which make up the history of our race, however numerous and important they may be, must sink into littleness when compared with the astonishing fact, that the Eternal Word,—the Son of God,—was made flesh, and tabernacled among men, and died, and rose again, and in his human nature is exalted at the right hand of God, all power being committed to him in heaven and on earth. And on the simple announcement of this truth, if we really believed it, we should be constrained to conclude that all other events connected with the government of this world must be overruled and determined in subserviency to the accomplishment of the purpose for which such an amazing spectacle was exhibited as that of God manifest in the flesh, suffering and dying for the salvation of his guilty creatures. It is impossible, I think, to believe this stupendous truth without drawing this conclusion from it; and the conclusion, as we have seen, is confirmed by the Scriptures, which assert that Christ, as Mediator, is Sovereign over "all things to the Church,"—while, to the Church herself, the people of God, they thus speak: "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

But the world will not believe this. By the great mass of mankind,—even of those who have had access to the Scriptures, and have had announced to them the momentous truth now stated, even by them that truth is treated as if it were the least

interesting and important of any thing which concerns the well-being of men, either as individuals or as communities. And it is but too evident that the wise men of this world, those who are most deeply concerned in directing the movements that are continually taking place in and among the kingdoms of the earth, lay their plans, and seek to carry them into execution, without any reference to the accomplishment of the one great plan to which God has declared that he will ultimately render all theirs subservient. Nay, who can doubt that the idea of all the great events, whether prosperous or adverse, which have most largely affected the kingdoms of the earth, forming part of that one plan by which God is to glorify himself in the salvation of his Church,—who can doubt that this idea would be laughed to scorn by no small portion of the rulers of this world, as well as of those who are ruled? In the eyes of the world, this divine plan has often been regarded as a dangerous, or, at the best, a contemptible thing,—dangerous, as often as any great visible movement has been made towards its accomplishment by any extensive revival of vital religion in communities professedly Christian, or by any vigorous effort to introduce the Gospel into heathen lands,—and contemptible, when, through the coldness and indifference of the Church, it appears quietly to take its place, and to form a part only of the world's own plans.

The progress of Christ's kingdom hitherto has been thus resisted, and apparently thwarted,—the world has acted in regard to it as if he were not able to extend and establish his Church,—and, as in the case of captive Judah of old, and of the dispersed of Israel at this day, God has borne long with this reproach of the enemy. His very forbearance, too, as in all past times, only hardens the world in its unbelief. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” They flatter themselves that things may go on as they have hitherto done, for an indefinite length of time. The infidel sentiment, if not openly avowed, secretly takes possession of men's minds, “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;” and in this sentiment they repose, unless when some revival of religion may at times disturb it, and call forth, as it never fails to

do, their open and bitter enmity. But Christ will come. The divine forbearance must have an end. All men must be made to know, in their happy or their bitter experience, that the Church is the great object of Christ's care,—that for which all things are put under him. And to the world, therefore, the gracious invitation, as well as the solemn prophetic warning, in the passage before us, is addressed: “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.”

The general tenor of Scripture prophecy plainly intimates, I think, that in the latter times there will be great tribulations on the earth, not only in immediate connection with the restoration of the Jews to the blessings and benefits of the Abrahamic covenant, but throughout the world at large; and that these tribulations will be visitations of judgment for the contempt with which the world has treated the Gospel, and the persecution to which the Church of Christ has been exposed. And the very neglect, or rejection, or perversion of the Gospel on the part of the nations, may itself prepare the instruments whereby these judgments will be inflicted when the appointed time comes. It is the Gospel alone that will ever lay an effectual restraint on the guilty passions of men; and if the world continues to grow in skill, and intelligence, and mental power, while the Gospel does not in the same degree exercise its softening, subduing, and sanctifying influence, but, on the contrary, becomes an object of growing dread and dislike to the great masses of mankind, then there will need only an occasion to call forth the natural selfishness of unrenewed hearts, and ungodly men will be ready to inflict on one another, as well as on the Church of Christ, all that the most appalling prophecies of Scripture have foretold. And, besides, and independent of all this, who can tell in how many ways God may execute his judgments, when he comes forth to plead his own cause, and arises to shake terribly the earth?

But the latter days will also be days of a glorious triumph for the truth. As in the case of the Jews, and the nations more immediately concerned in their sufferings, and immediately connected with their conversion, so in regard to the kingdoms of the world at large, the first clause of the passage under con-

sideration is prophetic. The nations will rejoice with God's people. Nor is this glorious prospect at all inconsistent with the judgments threatened in the subsequent part of the passage. On the contrary, we can easily conceive how it will be that when the judgments of the Lord are in the earth, "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." It is true, neither the terrors of judgments that are seen coming, nor the severity of these judgments when they do come, can change the heart, or turn sinners unto God. But they may be the occasion and the means of their so turning. Nations may be wasted and worn out by the calamities which they mutually inflict on one another, or exhausted by the desperate energy with which they carry on for a season the desolating work of internal war; and, wearied at length, and broken in spirit, they may long for rest, and cast about for a refuge from their own folly and madness. And, as in the case of individuals long pressed down with affliction, they may be more ready to listen to the gracious invitations of the Gospel, and induced to seek there "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." But we need not be very careful about attempting to explain how a season of great and general calamity may also be a season of a great and general revival of religion, or be immediately followed by such a season. We have the sure word of prophecy, and that is sufficient. God has promised, and it may be left to him to find the means of fulfilling his promise. Though he warns the world,—the whole race of ungodly and unconverted men,—that "he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries," he also declares, that he "will be merciful unto his land, and to his people." And though this promise does no doubt specially respect the land of Judea and his ancient people, it is not, I think, to be confined to them. I would willingly understand it of the whole earth, for that is to become his land, and of all the nations of the earth, for they are to become his people,—inasmuch as it is expressly foretold that Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,—that his dominion shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth,—and that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

If these events were near at hand, even at the door, would not the prospect of them force upon us the momentous question, On which side do we stand?—on the side of Christ, or on the side of the world? And who will venture to assert that these events are not near? or who would hazard the safety of his soul on their being still at a distance? It were very bold in any man, especially in these days, to attempt to estimate the rapidity with which the most momentous changes may take place, or to prescribe any given time as necessary for bringing about any one predicted event. But to put off the examination of the infinitely important question, whether we are on the side of Christ and his Church, or on the side of the world, and to do so on the ground that those events which will try every man are still at a great distance, is in fact an evasion of the question altogether; and while it obviously implies self-deception, it indicates, at the same time, a very dangerous state of mind. Our wisdom is to examine the question, as if we were on the very eve of not only witnessing, but participating in the fulfilment of all that is foretold in the passage before us, and to make very sure of the ground on which we come to decide that question. It is not enough that we are members of the visible Church,—that the views which we hold are sound and scriptural,—that we have been ready to testify against the doctrinal errors and the irreligious practices of the time in which we live,—and that we are recognised as brethren by those who are themselves true believers. Men may deceive themselves by mistaking an assent of the understanding to sound views of Scripture truth, for a living, saving faith; and they are never more likely so to deceive themselves than in a season of general excitement, when they are called to decide on some particular question by which the Christian community is agitated. They may decide on that question rightly, and be ready to conclude that all else is right with them spiritually; especially if, by the decision to which they come, and by the part which they have chosen, they have subjected themselves to worldly loss and inconvenience. Let us remember that nothing will avail us in the day of trial,—whether it be the time foretold in the passage before us, which we may see, or whether it be the day of death, which we must meet,—nothing will avail us on that day but the living faith which unites us to Christ.

Let us beware, then, of mistaking for this faith the interest which may have been awakened in our minds in or about any particular point, to which our attention may have been specially and powerfully called. The very purpose for which we have been brought into such circumstances is just to urge upon our attention the infinite importance of spiritual and eternal things,—to remind us of what we are but too prone to forget in times of outward peace and quietness, the declaration of Him who hath said, “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven,”—and to shut us up to a constant cleaving to and abiding in Christ, as the only refuge where we may hide ourselves until these calamities be overpast. And we have failed, therefore, to derive from these circumstances the great benefit which it was designed we should receive from them, if they have not deeply solemnised our minds,—if they have not led us to inquire more seriously into the ground of our hope, and the state of our soul Godward,—if they have not stirred us up to give greater diligence to make our calling and election sure.

LXI.

THE GOD OF JESHURUN.

DEUTERONOMY XXXIII. 26-29.

THESE are the last recorded words of Moses. It is probable, I think, that they were the last words which he addressed to the people of Israel ; for we are told towards the close of the preceding chapter, after Moses had spoken all the words of the song which the Lord had commanded him to write, and to teach Israel, that “the Lord spake unto Moses that self-same day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho ; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession : and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people.” Having received this command, he proceeded, it would appear, without delay, to pronounce a blessing on Israel,—his dying benediction,—as recorded in the chapter before us ; for it is said in the first verse of the chapter, “This is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.” And this done, we are immediately told, at the beginning of the next chapter, that “Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo,” and “died there, in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.”

We would conclude, therefore, that the words of the passage before us are not only the last words of Moses that have been recorded, but the very last which he spoke to Israel. And

it will be observed that they are exclusively words of consolation and encouragement, congratulating the people of Israel on the state of security and peace in which he was about to leave them, and, in so far as they were prophetic, predicting only prosperity and triumph over all their enemies. And how grateful and consolatory must it have been to Moses himself, to leave such a blessing behind him upon Israel, after the many solemn predictions of their sin and suffering which he had been commissioned to deliver! We cannot doubt that the prospect which was opened up to him in prophetic vision, while he foretold the glorious things here recorded concerning God's people, was one of the considerations which reconciled him to the irrevocable sentence, "Thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

But are we to understand the passage before us, then, it may be asked, as revoking all the threatened judgments which Moses had previously denounced and recorded against Israel? Does it imply that, after all, they were not to forget and forsake God, as it had often been predicted that they would, and that they were not, therefore, to incur the judgments of which they had as frequently been forewarned? And did Moses at last foresee nothing in the future history of Israel but the prosperity and triumphs which he has here foretold?

We cannot understand it as meaning any such thing. The backsliding of Israel, as well as the calamities which that backsliding was to bring upon them, was foretold as an event which was certainly to happen, in terms far too explicit to allow us to suppose that the prediction was only conditional, or that it meant nothing more than that if they did so backslide, they would assuredly be visited with the threatened judgments; and the subsequent history of Israel bears melancholy evidence that the very worst which Moses had foretold was realised, both as to their sin and their suffering.

But Moses saw, amidst all the rebellion with which Israel as a nation were to be chargeable, and amidst all the reverses which, in consequence of their disobedience, they were to experience, that the true Israel would be preserved, and defended, and cared for,—that though they, too, might have their share of affliction, in the way of necessary and even severe chastisement, yet they would never cease to be precious in the sight of Him who had

chosen Israel for his portion, and Jacob for the lot of his inheritance,—and that as it had been in the past, so, in the future, the Lord would be the dwelling-place of his people in all generations. And, looking beyond all the struggles which they would be required to maintain with their adversaries, and all the afflictions which their own sin might bring upon them, Moses foresaw the glorious issue of the conflict, which we find him repeatedly foretelling in his writings, even the final establishment of the Church, when the nations shall rejoice with God's people, and shall be glad with his inheritance.

To this glorious issue, then, he directs the faith of the Church, as that which might well sustain the hearts of God's people under the trials which they might be called to endure. These trials, throughout many successive generations, were to form part of the means whereby God was to prepare the way for the bringing in of the latter-day glory ; and in the verses before us, Moses virtually puts it to the Church, the people of God, whether an issue so great and glorious was not worth suffering for. And how powerfully was this appeal enforced by his own example ! He was known to Israel for the space of forty years ; but they were years of laborious exertion, incessant toil, perplexing anxiety and care,—all for the one great object of furthering God's gracious plans regarding his Church. And now, when, in the exercise of faith, and patience, and prayer, he had been enabled to surmount the most formidable difficulties, and was brought to the very confines of the land on the possession of which Israel were about to enter,—now, when the time had come at which he might have reckoned on a season of rest after his lengthened and harassing pilgrimage in the wilderness,—and now, while he was yet as fit as ever he had been to relish and enjoy that rest, inasmuch as “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated ;” instead of manifesting dissatisfaction or disappointment with the solemn declaration, “I have caused thee to see this land with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither,” his last words express not merely resignation but triumph,—triumph in the prosperity of Israel, as if all his personal interests were bound up in theirs, and as if, having fulfilled the part assigned to him in serving the Church, he had nothing more that he wished or cared to live for : “Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord !”

For the further illustration of the subject of these remarks, let us consider a little more particularly the import of the verses before us. And that in these words Moses addresses the true Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham, is evident, I think, from the name which he employs to designate them,—Jeshurun. The word signifies “upright,” or “righteous,”—a name which can be applied to none but those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. It is not frequently used as a name for Israel; and in the few places where it is so employed, it would seem to intimate that it is applied to those who really were the people of God. Even the more general term, Israel, is frequently used in this limited sense, as the apostle Paul more than once plainly intimates, as when he says, “They are not all Israel who are of Israel;” and in this sense Jeshurun seems to be always employed. In every case, indeed, where God calls himself the God of Israel or the God of Jeshurun, in the same sense as he called himself the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the terms Israel and Jeshurun must be understood as meaning Abraham’s spiritual seed; and the passage before us appears to me to require that the term employed should be so understood here.

Moses, then, begins by exalting the God of Jeshurun above all other gods; and he does so in language fitted to impress them with a conviction of the utter worthlessness and impotency of the gods of the nations. Israel were very soon to come into contact with the people of Canaan, and to be witnesses of their abominable idolatries,—their insensate worship of dumb idols, the work of their own hands; and what could more strongly contrast with this most lamentable debasement of man’s rational and spiritual nature, than the privilege which Israel enjoyed, in knowing and worshipping the God whom Moses here describes: “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky?”

The description conveys the idea of glorious majesty, of absolute sovereignty, of power infinitely beyond the reach of competition or resistance. It is the language which is frequently used in Scripture to set forth the greatness and the glory of God,—as when it is said in the sixty-eighth Psalm, “Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; to him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old;” or

when it is said in the hundred and fourth Psalm, "Who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind." And it was language peculiarly fitted to awaken reverence in the minds of Israel, by recalling to their remembrance the glorious revelation which God made of himself, when he came down in the sight of all the people on Mount Sinai, amidst clouds and thick darkness.

But it is not merely as a sublime representation of the majesty and mighty power of God, as the one only living and true God, that the words of Moses were peculiarly seasonable as addressed to Israel. Such a representation might have filled them with terror, as the actual manifestation of his presence on Sinai did, when he was revealed only as the righteous Lawgiver and the almighty Ruler. But while Moses does thus remind them of this view of the divine character, he introduces it in a connection fitted to awaken confidence. He does not merely tell them that the God of Jeshurun rideth on the heaven, but that he does so as Jeshurun's help; and that if he revealed his own excellency and glory, it was in working out their deliverance, and making bare his holy arm for their protection: "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky."

Such language could be addressed only to Jeshurun, the upright, the righteous, the justified people, the true Israel, the Church of the living God. To them only was the language applicable, and by them alone could it be received with joy and gladness. That the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, ought to be a terrible truth to all who have not yet been justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and it will be very terrible to all such when the conviction is first awakened, that as the Lawgiver he has condemned them, and that they must appear before him as the Judge, to be dealt with as eternal truth and justice shall dictate.

And oh, how many are there who are living carelessly and at ease, as if there were no such Ruler and Judge,—no such day on which the judgment is to be passed,—the final verdict given and recorded. They are familiar, it may be, with some vague notion of God's overruling providence, and with some idea equally vague of God's mercy,—but they have never made it a solemn and serious

question, how they are to stand in his presence when he comes to deal with them personally, and to pass sentence on them according to their state and character. And, on the other hand, do believers make all the use that they ought to do of the great and precious truth that God reigneth? He reigns as their God; and while he displays his own excellency,—while he rides in majesty and triumph on the heaven,—while he exercises an irresistible control over all things on earth, it is as their help, and for their protection.

And what peace should not this truth impart! What patience should it not inspire! What confidence should it not awaken and keep alive, even in circumstances the most gloomy, and otherwise the most perplexing! And if it does not produce this effect, must it not be because they are remaining contentedly in doubt whether they have really been justified and accepted with God, or are culpably insensible to the value of their privileges in having all their best interests bound up with the manifestation of his own glory? Did they realise and remember this truth, as it is alike their duty and their interest to do, they should be able to adopt the language of the prophet, “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

But the security of Jeshurun, God’s justified people, is still farther set forth in the next verse: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy.” Here, as in the preceding verse, it is assumed that the people of God are engaged in a conflict at once difficult and dangerous. In the former verse, they are assured of help,—here, the promise is enlarged. God is declared to be their refuge, or, as the word signifies, their dwelling-place,—not a temporary, but a perpetual refuge; and they are reminded that he is the eternal God, unchangeable in his being, and equally unchangeable in his purpose. In the ninetieth Psalm, which was written by Moses, we find the same truth stated: “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations;” and we find also the same care taken to assure

Israel that this dwelling-place is eternal, for it is immediately added, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

This eternity of God is set forth in connection with his being the dwelling-place of his people; and it must have been understood, by true believers in Israel, to mean, that as God from everlasting had purposed to be their dwelling-place, so he would continue to everlasting to be so. It was as the eternal God that he was their refuge. Whatever, therefore, might be the fluctuations which their condition and circumstances should undergo, their salvation was secured by an unchangeable purpose, and would assuredly be wrought out by a power equally enduring. And of this promise a visible pledge was to be given to them, and to the Church of all future times, in their settlement as a nation in the land of Canaan; while, in the struggle which preceded that settlement, and in the victory which secured it, there was exhibited a very intelligible representation of the spiritual conflict of believers, and of their glorious triumph over all their spiritual enemies.

In the course of that conflict, Israel might at times be in great jeopardy, from the number and the apparent strength of their enemies; but the Lord himself, even the eternal God, whose purpose and power can be affected by no outward change whatever, was their refuge, their hiding-place, their tower of defence, against which no strength of the adversary could prevail. The conflict itself might be protracted as well as severe, and Israel might be ready at times to relinquish it as hopeless; but the everlasting arms that never weary were underneath them, to sustain and support them. They might feel at times as if they were altogether unequal to any new conquest over the adversaries which still remained to be subdued; but God himself was to thrust out the enemy from before them, and to say, Destroy them, or, as it may be rendered, Let them perish. It was not merely permission or authority which Israel received to cast out the inhabitants of Canaan, and to take possession of their land. The command laid on Israel to go against these nations was to be accompanied with a divine power,—the solemn sentence, "Let them perish," carried with it a divine energy which could

not be resisted,—and Israel were often encouraged by the assurance, that it was the Lord himself who would fight for them and save them.

And so it is, and has always been, in regard to the spiritual conflict of believers. The Scripture saints, in relating their experience,—their fears and their hopes,—their dangers and their deliverances,—their seasons of depression and their times of triumph,—their painful struggles with temptation, and the strength by which they successfully resisted it,—the saints, in recording these, which they were commanded to do, for the instruction and encouragement of those who were to come after them, employ the very language which might have been appropriately used to describe the conflicts and conquests of Israel in Canaan. “Though an host,” says the Psalmist, “should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. . . . For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.” “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. . . . He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” “O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed; let not mine enemies triumph over me. . . . Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins. Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee.”

And to all who know any thing experimentally of the spiritual warfare of the believer, such language will be not only intelligible, but faithfully descriptive of what they have experienced; and in so far as they have been enabled to contend successfully with the risings of a corrupt nature within, the temptations of a sinful world without, the suggestions of Satan,—with every thing that would have brought their spiritual interests into jeopardy,—every thing that would have marred their peace, and robbed them of their comfort,—and in so far as they can now cherish the good hope of ultimately gaining the victory over all

these, their spiritual enemies, it is because they have experienced the faithfulness of the declaration, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy."

From this description of the conflict of God's people, Moses proceeds to foretell their final and glorious triumph: "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew." Israel then shall dwell in safety and alone. Viewing this prediction merely as referring to the settlement of Israel in Canaan, it was, in the first instance at least, only partially fulfilled. Israel did not so conquer the land as to dwell either in safety or alone. Through their unbelief, the command, Destroy, which otherwise would have been accompanied by a divine power, was not fully carried into effect; for because of the sin of the generation that succeeded those whom Moses addressed, God did not drive out the nations which Joshua left when he died, that through them he might prove Israel, whether they would keep the way of the Lord, as their fathers did keep it, or not. Had they acted upon the commission which they received in the command to destroy, and firmly confided in the promise which that command involved, there would have been exhibited, in respect at least to outward condition, the state of things here contemplated in prophecy by Moses. Israel would have dwelt alone, the sole proprietors of the land of Canaan; and they would have dwelt in safety, because, having no enemies within,—that is, none who threw off the worship of their fathers' God,—the fear of them and the dread of them would have been laid on the enemies that were without, even on all the nations that were round about them.

But, even if all this had been realised, and Israel had literally dwelt alone and in safety, yet it would have been but a type of the still more glorious state of things to which Moses, I think, was instructed to direct the faith and hope of the Church. If the prediction was mainly spoken of and addressed to Jeshurun,—the true Israel,—then it must be regarded as extending far beyond the dispensation which Moses had introduced; and if so, nothing short of the glory of the latter day can exhaust the meaning of this passage.

And, in addition to what has already been stated, to show that the passage before us was spoken with reference to the Church, the spiritual seed of Abraham, as a people separated from a sinful world, not merely by local circumstances and worldly advantages, but by character and spiritual privileges, I would observe, that subsequent prophecies, of which there can be no doubt that they predict the triumphs and final establishment of Christ's kingdom, will be found to be just the expansion, or the more full and lengthened statement, of what is here so concisely but comprehensively stated: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. . . . And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for,"—and the reason given for this safety shows that the figurative language now quoted is to be understood as setting forth the blessed effects of the universal spread of the Gospel,—“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” “Israel then shall dwell in safety alone.”

And in like manner, as in the passage before us, the abundant communication of heavenly blessings which will distinguish that time is set forth in other prophecies by the figure of temporal plenty: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.” And if the verses under consideration, as well as the passages which I have quoted, and which might be

greatly multiplied, do refer to the glory of the latter day, then surely a subject introduced so early, and dwelt upon so frequently, in the Word of God, must have been intended to minister largely to the encouragement and instruction of the Church in every successive age.

And so it assuredly ought; for what should give interest, in the estimation of believers, to the events of their own day, or to the history of events that are past, if it be not the bearing of these events on the bringing about of that state of things which is especially to show forth the glory of Him to whom they are indebted for all their own hope and consolation? Many generations, indeed, have passed away, and we too may follow them, and still the prediction remain unfulfilled. But we have in Moses an example of the satisfaction and delight with which the saints of old contemplated the future prosperity of the Church, even when they should be gathered to their fathers; for though he was not to enter on the promised land, or participate in the rich blessings which awaited Israel there, yet could any one of them, even the man who had the prospect of sharing the longest and the most largely in these blessings, have expressed himself more joyously and with warmer gratitude in that prospect than Moses did in the last words which he addressed to the congregation of Israel? "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

These words, as addressed to Israel, breathed all the affection of a father taking a death-bed farewell of his children, of whom he believed that he was leaving them, not only under the protection, but in the enjoyment of the favour of that gracious God who had fed him all his life long,—the Angel which had redeemed him from all evil: for never did a father watch more anxiously, or labour more unweariedly, or pray more urgently and boldly for the children whom he loved as his own soul, than Moses did for the people of Israel. The more that they vexed and grieved him, the more deeply concerned did he become in their welfare; and though, in a moment of irritation, he sinned against God, and forfeited beyond recovery his personal interest

in Canaan, yet none of his brethren could say that he had sinned against them, or that, when he spake unadvisedly with his lips, he was actuated by any other motive than a regard to their best interests, and a feeling of anger and disappointment because, as he thought, they were determined to ruin themselves.

But though the parental affection which Moses felt for Israel might afford him peculiar satisfaction and delight in addressing to them the words of the passage before us, and though his mind might be mainly occupied at the moment with the peace, and rest, and prosperity on which they were about to enter; yet in this last verse he has described, in language alike simple and expressive, the present condition and the final state of believers of all times and in all circumstances. Of true believers, who are in the enjoyment of a sense of God's favour, whatever be their worldly condition, it may be truly said, "Happy art thou, O Israel;" and of such also it may be said, with far more profound meaning than could be said of the mere temporal deliverance of Israel as a nation from the bondage of Egypt, "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" Israel, even in regard to worldly condition, were saved by the Lord; and often was their deliverance, and the expense at which it was wrought out, urged upon them as the most powerful motive to secure their gratitude and submission: "I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

The argument, as addressed to Israel, was very strong and very affecting. But how unspeakably stronger and more affecting is the argument as addressed to Christians by the apostle, when he says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Truly it may be said of believers, "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" Equally applicable to believers now, as it was to Israel of old, is the declaration that the Lord who has saved them is the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency; for not less real is the divine agency which gives to believers now the victory over their spiritual enemies, than that which cast down the walls

of Jericho before the people of Israel, or which effected the most striking of the other miraculous deliverances which that people experienced.

And, finally, it will be with the Church as it was with Israel,—that her enemies shall be found liars unto her; and she shall tread upon their high places. Often, I doubt not, were the people of Israel ready to quail and become faint-hearted before the demonstration of strength which their enemies mustered against them. But when in faith they laid hold on God's promise, and vigorously employed the means of God's appointing for their protection or deliverance, they found that all the threatenings and boastings of their enemies were but great swelling words of vanity, and that when the hour of conflict came, these enemies were terror-stricken, and ready to offer feigned obedience. They were found liars, boasting of what they could not do.

And so it will be at last with the Church in her conflict with the world, when the truth shall prevail over error, and infidelity, and all the delusions of the wicked one,—when Christ shall take to him his great power and reign,—when his arrows shall be sharp in the heart of his enemies, and he shall subdue the people under him. And so likewise it will be with every individual believer. Now he may for a season be in heaviness through manifold temptations, under which his faith at times may be ready to fail him; and at such seasons his great adversary may seek to have him, that he may sift him as wheat. But take courage, O humble and mourning believer, the promise is sure and sealed. All the suggestions of thy great adversary, whereby he has disturbed thy comfort,—all the doubts which he has awakened in thy mind, as to the issue of thy conflict,—all the suspicions which he has excited in regard to the wisdom and goodness of thy heavenly Father's dealings with thee,—all the accusations by which he has harassed thy conscience, and sought to drive thee to despair,—all the plausible arguments that may have been presented to thee to shake thy faith in the efficacy of the Saviour's blood to cleanse thy guilt, and in the all-sufficiency of his righteousness to secure thy justification;—all will be found lies: Christ will bruise Satan under thy feet, and thou shalt be more than conqueror through Him that loved thee.

LXII.

NO PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES.

DEUTERONOMY XXXIV. 10.

It is generally supposed that this last chapter of Deuteronomy was written by Joshua ; and it were difficult, I think, to suppose any thing else. As the successor of Moses, Joshua was to carry on the work which had been left unaccomplished by his predecessor, by conducting the people of Israel into the land of Canaan ; and he was, moreover, to record, as he did in the Book which bears his name, all that God did by him for his people, as Moses had recorded the wonderful works which had been wrought for Israel by his hand. And with what can we suppose Joshua to have commenced his record of the divine dealings, his journal of the events which befell Israel under his guidance, but with an account of the death of him whose servant he had long been, and whose successor he was appointed to be,—one whose confidence he had enjoyed from his youth up,—for whose honour he had manifested a child-like jealousy,—and whom he must all along have loved and venerated as a father ? To none could it be more gratifying than to Joshua to record the divine testimony which is borne to Moses in this chapter ; and on this ground alone we might, I think, conclude that it was graciously granted to him, for his encouragement, to commit that testimony to writing. It is the opinion, indeed, of some commentators, that this last chapter of Deuteronomy originally formed the first chapter of the book of Joshua, and that, in the course of copying the

Scriptures, it has been transferred from the one book to the other, obviously on the ground that what is there recorded forms a most natural conclusion to the history of Moses. But however this may be, it is in the highest degree improbable that Joshua would begin to record what he himself was commissioned to do for Israel, without narrating the circumstances of the death of Moses; and I conclude, therefore, that it was Joshua who was directed to put on record the words, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

But it may be said, perhaps, that the expression, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel," would seem to imply that this passage must have been written at a much later period, when Moses could be compared with the other prophets that arose after him, and when it might be evident, as a matter of fact, that among them all there was none like him. The inference from this would be, that the words before us were the last written words of the Old Testament Scriptures; for it was only after the last of the prophets had appeared, and when the gift of prophecy was withdrawn from the Jewish Church, that an actual comparison could be made between Moses and those who after him were invested with the prophetic office. But there is no necessity for having recourse to such a mode of explaining the language of this passage. The word here rendered "since" signifies, and is elsewhere translated in Scripture, "again," or, "at any time;" and the passage therefore may, and, I think, ought to run thus: "And there arose not again—or, any more—a prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

The passage in fact is prophetic, declaring that no man, even though invested with the character and office of a prophet, should ever be admitted to such close and familiar converse with God as Moses had been. And it is nothing more than, in substance, the same declaration which God himself had previously made to Aaron, when rebuking him and Miriam for having dared to speak against Moses, and to question the divine authority under which he acted. On that occasion, a very plain distinction was drawn between Moses and all other prophets that ever might be raised up from among the sinful children of men; and the

distinction is the same as that stated in this passage. "And the Lord came down," we are told, "in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" Here it was plainly intimated, that God had conferred with Moses as he never would confer with any other prophet, for "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend;" and the same intimation is renewed, and very appropriately, in the passage before us, when recording the death of Moses. The intimation, indeed, is not expressed in the form of a prediction. It is not said, And there shall not arise again in Israel a prophet like unto Moses; but "There arose not" again,—as if all the prophets who succeeded Moses had already appeared, and it had been found, on actual comparison, that none of them had been like him. This, however, is just a very emphatic manner of declaring God's purpose, and the absolute certainty with which that purpose was to be adhered to, that he was never again to know any prophet face to face as he had known Moses, and that in this respect none like him should ever again arise in Israel.

But in the eighteenth chapter of this very book, we find Moses thus addressing the people of Israel: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." Now, viewing this prediction or promise in connection with the passage before us, what would we natu-

rally infer from it? We could hardly fail to conclude, that the Prophet thus foretold must be one with whom none of the other prophets could be compared,—that there was to be a peculiar, a mysterious something in his person and character, which was to distinguish him from every other who might at any time bear a divine commission,—that, in fact, he could not be ranked at all among those whom God successively employed as prophets in the usual way, to communicate his will to the Old Testament church. It is only on this ground that we can reconcile the statement in this passage, that “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses,” with the promise expressly and repeatedly given in the passage which I have quoted, that God would raise up a Prophet in Israel like unto him. And this, in truth, is the explanation of the two statements, which, at first sight, may seem to be inconsistent with each other. An inspired apostle has told us that it was Christ of whom Moses spoke when he said, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet . . . like unto me.” But Christ was not to be ranked among the prophets, who were from time to time sent to the people of Israel with a revelation of the divine will. He was a Prophet in a peculiar sense, being not only distinguished from, but infinitely superior to them all, so that he was not and could not be reckoned one of them. And this is very emphatically declared in this passage, when it is said that there arose not again a prophet like unto Moses, while there stood on record an express promise that such a prophet should arise. The prophet thus promised was an exception; and notwithstanding his appearing, the statement in this passage was still true. That statement did, in fact, virtually assert Christ’s divinity; and though not understood in all its depth of meaning by the Old Testament Church, it must have served, with other predictions concerning Christ, to awaken in the minds of believers very exalted thoughts and very large expectations concerning Him whom Moses foretold as the Prophet whom the Lord their God was to raise up from among them.

But though care was thus taken to exalt Christ,—to place him infinitely above the level of all other prophets,—yet it was foretold of him that he was to be like Moses,—a prediction which, viewed in relation to Moses, contained the most honour-

able testimony that was or could be borne to him. It was a very high distinction to have it said of him, as it is said of him in this passage, that there arose not again a prophet in Israel like unto him whom the Lord knew face to face. But how unspeakably more honourable still was the prediction, that He who was distinguished from all other prophets by his infinite superiority to them all, and whom it was not permitted to the Church to reckon among them, should have been foretold by this mark of distinction also, that he was to be like Moses. It may not, then, be uninteresting or un instructive to inquire, what it was that constituted the likeness between Christ and Moses. And it is plain, I think, that this likeness must have mainly consisted in the peculiarly intimate and familiar converse which Moses was privileged to hold with God, when it was said, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." But besides this,—to which I may have occasion again to advert,—we might expect to find in the history of Moses,—in the providences which befell him, in the treatment which he experienced, in the work to which he was appointed, and in the termination of his labours,—I say, we might expect to find, in all these, points of resemblance to Christ which it were impossible to mistake.

No doubt, such a resemblance was not peculiar to Moses, but common to him with many others, in whose public character and office were to be found what are commonly called Types of Christ. But the declaration in the passage under consideration, taken in connection with the promise to which I have been referring, would lead us to expect in Moses a closer, a more sustained, and a longer continued type of Christ, than is to be found in others who were types of him only in respect of some special character which they bore, and some peculiar circumstance in which for a season they were placed. The declaration, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee," was a very comprehensive declaration, and one which warrants us to seek in the history of Moses typical resemblances of Christ which we might not be warranted to look for in any other of the Old Testament prophets. Christ was like Moses; but like Moses there arose not again any other prophet in Israel.

Viewing Moses then as a type of Christ, we find that the re-

semblance or likeness, in regard to outward circumstances, began to appear at a very early period in their history. At the time Moses was born, all the male children of Israel who were born in Egypt were under sentence of death,—doomed to be thrown into the river by the command of a despotic monarch, whose authority none durst openly question, far less disobey. But Moses was saved by a marvellous interposition of Providence; and the very man who had doomed him to death was made the instrument of rearing him to manhood, and in some degree preparing him for the momentous work to which he was to be called,—even that of carrying into effect God's promise to Abraham, that at the end of four hundred years, during which Abraham's posterity were to be strangers in a land that was not theirs, and evil entreated and afflicted, he would judge the nation that so oppressed them, and make them come out with great substance. When Christ was born, he was exposed to a similar danger, and from a similar cause; for Herod, with the view of cutting off Him who was born King of the Jews, "sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem," where Christ was born, "and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under." But in doing so, he was, like Pharaoh, only a blind instrument in fulfilling the revealed purposes of God; for Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, being warned of God in a dream, arose, and "took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." And I would remark in passing, that this prediction, which will be found in the 11th chapter of Hosea, does itself suggest a resemblance between Christ and Moses, inasmuch as it was spoken immediately, and in the first instance, of the deliverance of Israel, whom God called his son and his first-born, although its full accomplishment took place only when the child Jesus was brought again out of Egypt into the land of Israel. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

But the main point of resemblance between Christ and Moses, in regard to the danger which threatened them in their infancy, was the momentous result which depended on their preservation.

The great object of Pharaoh in commanding that the male children of the Hebrews, or Israelites, should be cast into the river, was to prevent them multiplying, lest, if they did multiply and become mighty, they might join the enemies of Egypt, and fight against the Egyptians, and so get them up out of the land. In like manner, Herod's great object was to cut off the child who had been foretold in prophecy as the King of the Jews, and whom, therefore, with a strange but not uncommon mixture of infidelity and superstition, he dreaded as the rival of his temporal power. The object of the one, if he could have accomplished it, would have been to prevent the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt,—the object of the other, if he had succeeded, would have been to prevent the redemption of the Church, God's elect people, from the slavery of sin and Satan, and from the condemnation of the divine law. But Moses was saved to be the instrument of accomplishing the one,—and the child Jesus was preserved to effect the other. In both cases, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed. But he that sitteth in the heavens did laugh; the Lord did hold them in derision. He made the wrath of man to praise him, and he restrained the remainder of his wrath.

Such was the first point of resemblance or likeness between Christ and Moses which is presented to us in what we find recorded concerning them; and that resemblance may be traced in a great variety of circumstances which subsequently marked their history, but of which I can only present a brief notice. When Moses, after living for a time in retirement and obscurity, was called to the great work of delivering the people of God from the bondage of Egypt, his divine commission was attested by a series of miracles, which were wrought from time to time throughout the whole course of his public ministry. He baffled the magicians of Egypt, the ministers of darkness, who sought to emulate the signs and wonders which he exhibited, and compelled them to acknowledge the finger of God in the miracles which he wrought. When he lifted up his rod, and stretched his hand over the sea, the waters were divided, and the sea became dry land. And when the people of Israel were shut up in the wilderness, he fed them with manna, and gave them of the corn of

heaven, so that man did eat angel's food. So, when Jesus, after a season of retirement, during which he lived with his parents at Nazareth, and was subject to them, entered on his public ministry, his divine mission was in like manner attested by a continued series of miracles, and signs, and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of all the people. He manifested his sovereignty over unclean spirits, the powers of darkness, not only casting them out of the bodies of men whom they possessed, but compelling them to acknowledge, with terror and dismay, that he was "the Holy One of God." Nature, too, owned his supreme control; for when "he rebuked the winds and the sea," they obeyed him, "and there was a great calm." And when the multitudes followed him into a desert place, where they had nothing to eat, he fed them with five barley loaves and two small fishes, thereby, as well as in the manner wherewith Israel had been fed in the wilderness, typically setting forth himself as the true bread which cometh down from heaven, that men may eat thereof and not die.

In the manner, too, in which Christ and Moses respectively were prepared for and carried on their undertaking, we find very striking points of resemblance. When Moses received the law on Mount Sinai, he fasted forty days and forty nights; and on descending from the mount, his face shone with the reflected glory of God, so that the people of Israel were afraid to come nigh him. When Christ entered on his public ministry, he fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness; and when he was transfigured on the mount, in the presence of Peter, and James, and John, "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Of Moses, we are told that he appointed seventy elders, upon whom was put a portion of his own spirit, whereby they were qualified to share his labours; and that on approaching the borders of Canaan, he sent twelve men to spy out the land, previously to Israel's going up to take possession of it. Christ, during his personal ministry, appointed seventy disciples, whom he sent forth to heal the sick, and to preach the good news of the kingdom, and who "returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." And, at last, he sent out the twelve apostles to go into all lands to commence that mighty undertaking which is one

day to terminate in the subjugation of the whole world to his spiritual government,—when the heathen shall be given him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,—when his dominion shall “extend from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.” And from the nature of the work to which Moses was called, the redemption of Israel from bondage, being itself typical of the great redemption which Christ came to work out, we find names or titles given to him which imply that he stood in the same relation to Israel, in regard to their temporal deliverance, that Christ stands in to the Church, his redeemed people, and names or titles, therefore, which are in like manner given to Christ. Moses was called God’s chosen or elect, and the servant of the Lord, in a sense in which no other prophet ever was. Christ was foretold as the servant of the Lord whom he upheld, his elect in whom his soul delighted. Moses was the deliverer, the lawgiver, the ruler, and the judge of Israel; and everywhere Christ is set forth as bearing all these characters in reference to his Church. Moses was to Israel a mediator and intercessor with God; Christ is declared to be the one Mediator between God and man: and it is testified of him that “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” And when we look at all these points of resemblance, well may we conclude in the words of an able and pious writer on this subject, “Is this similitude and correspondence between Moses and Christ the effect of chance? ‘Let us search,’ says one, ‘all the records of universal history, and see if we can find a man so like to Moses as Christ, or so like to Christ as Moses. If we cannot find such an one, then we have found Him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.’”

It will readily occur to all who are familiar with the writings of Moses, and with the Gospel histories, that the points of resemblance to which I have been referring might be found in greater numbers, and more minutely, as well as more extensively traced, than I have attempted to find or to trace them. But the main point of resemblance between Christ and Moses, as I have already hinted, was the singular privilege which Moses enjoyed,

of being admitted to very near and intimate communion with God, and the holy boldness with which he availed himself of that privilege. It was this which especially distinguished him from all the other prophets who came after him : for it is said that there was no other prophet whom the Lord knew face to face ; and it was this, therefore, that did especially make him like Christ. To other prophets God made himself known in a vision, or spoke in a dream. But with Moses he spake mouth to mouth, even apparently, and showed him his similitude, as far as frail human nature could be strengthened to endure a manifestation of the divine glory. Moses did not merely receive a commandment, as other prophets were wont to be commanded, to make such and such communications of the divine will to the Church. He was admitted, as it were, to the divine counsels, and encouraged to speak his mind regarding some of the divine proposals. For forty days and forty nights he remained in mysterious communing with God ; and the nearness of that communing, the familiar nature of that converse, may be inferred from the character of the prayers which we find Moses presenting. On some occasions they were more like remonstrances than prayers ; they were, in fact, arguments, whereby he sought to avert the judgments which, to all appearance, it was the settled purpose of God to execute upon Israel. Take as an example the marvellous scene described in the 14th chapter of Numbers, verses 11-19. And his prayers prevailed ; for on more than one occasion "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people ;" and in the case which I have just quoted, the Lord said, "I have pardoned according to thy word."

To all this, no parallel is to be found in the history of any other mere man. If we would see any thing like it, we must look to Him who is the "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." It is true, Moses, with all the honour that was put upon him, and all the nearness to God to which he was admitted, was still but a very dim representation of Christ,—the finite and imperfect type of Him who is infinite in excellence and glory. But still, Moses did typify Christ in his mediatorial character, and as the prophet who came to reveal the will and character of God as no other man ever did. It

was the peculiar distinction of Christ as the great Prophet,—that which placed him at an infinite distance above all other prophets,—that he shared in the divine counsels,—that he was with God from the beginning, participating in all his plans, and rejoicing always before him,—that, as the only-begotten Son, he was in the bosom of the Father, and could alone declare him,—that the Father loved him, and showed him all things that he himself did,—and that, therefore, when he revealed the Father's will, he spoke that which he knew, and testified that which he had seen. And we have seen that it was the peculiar distinction of Moses, that he received communications of the divine will, not in the usual way, or by the usual channels which were employed for conveying revelations of the mind of God to other prophets, but by holding immediate converse with God, the Lord speaking to him "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."

And the resemblance may be traced to the very end of the ministry of Moses. He was the mediator in that covenant whereby there was secured to Israel the possession of Canaan. But through sin he forfeited his own lot in the promised inheritance, and in consequence of the solemn sentence, "Thou shalt not go over this Jordan," it became impossible for Israel to enter on the possession of that inheritance till the sentence was executed. The death of the mediator became necessary to their being established in Canaan. And herein was one of the many predictions of the death of Christ,—the Mediator of the better covenant,—as that without which his people never could have become partakers of the spiritual blessings of that covenant. That death, too, was the consequence of sin,—the imputed sin of his people,—which Christ bare in his own body on the tree, suffering the just for the unjust, that he might bring sinners unto God. Even on this imperfect review, then, of the resemblance between Christ and Moses, how true does it appear, on the one hand, that the Lord did raise up a Prophet unto Israel from among their brethren like unto Moses! and how emphatically true, on the other, that "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face!"

Such was the honour which God was pleased to put upon his servant Moses. No other prophet like him ever arose in Israel;

and the more emphatically to mark this, Christ was foretold as the Prophet who was to be like him. Of this honourable distinction, Moses himself could not see the full extent. He saw and felt enough, indeed, to fill his soul with admiration and gratitude,—enough to command his willing and devoted services to God and his Church,—enough to awaken a joyful anticipation of the glorious things which awaited the Church even here, when the Prophet who was to be like him should arise in Israel, and of the still more glorious portion which was reserved for God's people hereafter. But like all the Old Testament prophets, he could see the day of Christ but dimly, and as it were afar off; and could not, therefore, be aware of the many points of resemblance between himself and the mysterious Person whom he at once foretold and typified. And what, then, would Moses have felt, if he had been able to read his own writings as we can now read them, or to contemplate his own history as it is now presented to us in the full light of the Gospel revelation? Have we no advantage, even over Moses himself, in this respect? The question may to some, perhaps, appear strange; for we are prone to think that such distinguished men of old, as Moses and the prophets were, enjoyed privileges far beyond any which are or can be enjoyed now. And no doubt they were peculiarly favoured. They knew that there was pardon for sin through the blood of atonement; and the intercourse with God to which they were admitted, and the visible manifestations which he made of his nearness to them, were pledges that, being pardoned, their relation to God, their enjoyment of his favour and fellowship, would be eternal.

But wherein consists the blessedness of this fellowship with God? Does it not flow from the knowledge of his character? Does it not grow with every new and more enlarged discovery of his perfections? Especially, is it not inseparably connected with the knowledge of Christ, into whose image we must be transformed?—a transformation which, we are told, will be complete when he appears, inasmuch as we shall then be like him, “for we shall see him as he is.” And is it no advantage, then, to see Christ clearly revealed where formerly he was but dimly fore-shown, and to find his mediatorial work set forth in circumstances and events which at the time were not perceived to have

any thing of a prophetical character? What but this clearer revelation of Christ, and the new light which was thereby shed on the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, was referred to by our Lord, when he said to the disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." It is this consideration which ought to give to the Old Testament Scriptures a peculiar interest in the eyes of humble and believing inquirers into God's Word. For what do such persons mainly seek in that Word,—what is the chief object which they look for there, but to find Christ? And what is better fitted to fill them with admiration and joy than to discover him, his person, his character, and his mediatorial work, where they had not before seen him, and to find new examples of the truth, that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy?" It is a very solemn thought, in reference to the careless and unconcerned, that the great subject of all the divine communications to men for thousands of years was the person and work of his own Son, whom he foretold in prophecy and prefigured in ordinances, till, in the fulness of time, he sent him in the flesh to die for and to save the guilty; and that yet multitudes who have this marvellous record in their hand have never read or pondered it with half the interest which the idlest tale, the veriest trifle, has awakened. But how precious a thought to the humble, the penitent, and believing, that He who is all their salvation and all their desire did thus from the beginning constitute the great subject of divine revelation,—that such care should have been taken to set him forth to their faith and hope,—that they should not be able to open the divine record, without finding Him whose name is their strong tower into which they run and are safe,—and that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for their learning, that they through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

LXIII.

THE COMMISSION TO JOSHUA.

JOSHUA I. 9.

THESE words form part of a communication which God was pleased to make to Joshua immediately after the death of Moses. That communication, considered merely in reference to Joshua, and as having no more extended application, would, even in this limited view, be full of interest and instruction. Joshua was selected to be the successor of Moses, to carry into effect what the latter had left undone, even to conduct the people of Israel across Jordan, and to plant them in the promised land. For this purpose he had been set apart authoritatively by the command of God, and ministerially by Moses, who had laid his hands upon him, so that he was filled with the spirit of wisdom, and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, even as they had hearkened unto Moses.

But this anointing of the spirit of wisdom and of might was not to exempt Joshua from the necessity of laboriously exercising all his skill, and putting forth all his strength in discharging the duties of his high, and honourable, and holy calling. He was, indeed, assured, in the most explicit terms, that he was to carry Israel over Jordan into the land that had been promised to them,—that every place that the sole of his foot should tread upon would be given to him,—that unto the people he should certainly divide the land that had been sworn unto their fathers,—and that no man should be able to stand before him all the

days of his life; for that as God had been with Moses, so he would be with him whithersoever he went, and would not fail him nor forsake him. But with all these assurances of the divine presence, and with all the communications of divine wisdom and strength which were secured to him, he was, at the same time, straitly charged to observe and do according to all the law which Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded him,—that the book of the law should not depart out of his mouth, but that he should meditate therein day and night,—and that he should observe to do according to all that was written therein, turning from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, for that then he should make his way prosperous, and then he should have good success.

He was thus taught that the communication of the spirit of wisdom which he had already received, and which he might reckon on in still larger measure, was not to supersede his constant study of the revealed will of God, as the channel through which the Spirit was to operate in directing and guiding him in the path of duty; and that he was to exercise his understanding in searching the written Word, as diligently as if that had been the only source from which he was to derive all the wisdom and practical knowledge of which he stood in need.

And the lesson is as needful for believers now as it was for Joshua. They, too, are taught that the promised aids of the Holy Spirit are not to supersede the diligent exercise of all the powers and faculties of their own mind. When the Spirit is given them as the Spirit of grace and supplication, it is not only to make intercession for them, which may be with groanings that cannot be uttered, but to help their infirmities,—to awaken in their souls holy and earnest desires,—to teach them how to pray, and what to pray for. And when he is given as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, it is to guide them, in the careful study of the written Word, and in the diligent exercise of their understanding and judgment, to a right conclusion in matters both of faith and duty.

Joshua, in like manner, was warned that the Spirit of might, on whose sustaining power he might rely, was not to render him insensible either to the pain of the laborious efforts which he would be required to make, or to the formidable nature of the

dangers which he would have to encounter. The communication which he received, and which is recorded in the passage before us, plainly intimated that his strength and his fortitude were to be tried to the uttermost; for in it we find the admonition repeated for the third time, "Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed."

And believers, generally, are hereby taught that divine aid is not to exempt them from toil and suffering; but they are at the same time assured, that if they toil and suffer in faith, that aid will be forthcoming to the full extent of their need. They are commanded to be strong, and of a good courage,—not that their own strength or their own courage can get them the victory, but because it is in the exercise of these that the promised help will come to them. When the lame man was commanded to rise, and take up his bed and walk, it was in his believing effort to do so that his feet and ankle-bones received strength.

The passage before us, thus viewed in reference to Joshua alone, is fitted to suggest important practical reflections, alike instructive and encouraging to true believers. But at present I would take a more extended view of the subject. The commencement of Joshua's labours as the successor of Moses marks a very memorable period in the history of the divine dispensations for gradually unfolding God's gracious purposes regarding his Church. That history is contained in the preceding five books of the Bible, and includes a period of not less than two thousand five hundred years. As a record of God's dealings with men through a course of so many ages, and confined within such narrow limits, it must necessarily be very concise. But it is also very comprehensive in the general revelation which it makes of the character, perfections, and moral government of God; and especially in regard to the one great subject of all the divine communications to fallen man,—the way of his recovery.

This plan of redemption was the first subject of revelation which was vouchsafed to our guilty first parents; and the design of all subsequent communications from God was to develop or unfold this plan more and more clearly. The terms in which the first announcement of the covenant of grace was made, and which contain the substance of all that has since been revealed, were very remarkable, and are very impressively brought before

us by the admonition here given to Joshua. They announced a warfare,—a conflict of a very desperate and deadly kind, to one of the parties. They were uttered in the form of a curse upon the serpent: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Christ, as every one knows, was pre-eminently the seed of the woman; and the conflict really came to an issue only when Christ did upon the cross spoil principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, and when by his death, wherein his heel,—his mere human nature,—was bruised, he destroyed, bruised the head of him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

But though this victorious conflict of Christ was the main subject of the first announcement of the plan of man’s redemption, and though Christ alone could maintain and finish it in triumph, yet in his strength, and under his administration, the conflict began and was carried on for four thousand years before he came into the world; and it was to animate him in this conflict that Joshua was addressed in the words before us, “Be strong, and of a good courage.” Though Christ, as I have already remarked, was emphatically and pre-eminently the seed of the woman, but for whom the serpent must have triumphed in the irretrievable ruin of the human race; yet there are, and have been in all ages, others who, in virtue of their relation to him as his redeemed people, and whom he is not ashamed to call brethren, are also included under the title of “the seed of the woman.” There are true believers, who in every age have constituted the Church, as distinguished from the ungodly and unbelieving,—the world lying in sin,—those who, in the first announcement of the plan of redemption, are called “the seed of the serpent.”

It was thus declared that the serpent himself was not the only adversary with whom the seed of the woman would have to contend, but that the serpent’s seed were also to take part in the unholy warfare; and that this seed did and still does consist of all impenitent and ungodly men is very plainly taught by our Lord himself, when he said of the unbelieving Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth,

because there is no truth in him." From the beginning, then,—from the moment that there were individuals enough in the world to form two classes, believers and unbelievers, godly and ungodly,—the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent began to manifest itself; and in the first five books of Scripture, we have the history of this conflict down to the period referred to in the passage we are considering, when the state of the contending parties became more palpable than it had been at any former period, because the conflict was about to be carried on with greater energy and on a larger scale than it had ever been before.

And, accordingly, the individual who was to act a prominent part in this more extended warfare was animated by the command and encouraged by the promise given in the words, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

We are naturally led by this passage, considering the occasion on which it was spoken, and the purpose which it was designed to serve, to consider the preceding books of Scripture as an historical record, intended, among other purposes, to illustrate the meaning and to demonstrate the truth of the prediction, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." And I would willingly believe that there are few so little acquainted with the contents of these books as not readily to recognise the truth of this remark. I do not mean, therefore, to enter either very minutely or at great length on the illustrations which these books furnish of the conflict which has from the beginning been maintained between the two classes into which our race has been and ever will be divided.

But I cannot help remarking generally, how often, in the course of the history written by Moses, the seed of the serpent seemed to be on the very eve of a full and final victory, in the utter extirpation of the seed of the woman, the Church, the body of true believers. Cain, who was of that wicked one, the serpent, was permitted to kill his brother Abel; and for a time Cain's posterity seemed to have had the undisputed ascendancy, so as to put down the very profession of religion; for it was not till more than a hundred years after the birth of Seth, whom God

gave to our first parents in the room of Abel, that men began to call themselves by the name of the Lord.

Nor did this combination among the children of Seth, for maintaining the knowledge and the worship of the true God, make any great head against abounding iniquity ; for as men, God's professing people, multiplied, they formed alliances with the ungodly, and gradually degenerated, so that the earth became corrupt, and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And so utterly and incurably corrupt did it become, that after an hundred and twenty years' warning by Noah, who, as a preacher of righteousness, foretold the coming judgments of God, not one beyond the limits of his own family seems to have been persuaded to repent and turn unto God, that he might live. Eight persons only were saved when God brought in the flood on the world of the ungodly. And scarcely were these eight placed beyond the reach of danger, when there appeared, even among them, manifestations of the enmity which the seed of the serpent has never ceased to cherish against the seed of the woman. Even among these eight, there was a Ham, a profane scoffer. And as men again multiplied, they advanced rapidly towards the same state of ungodliness which had already overwhelmed the world in almost universal ruin, when God selected Abraham, who was himself sinking into idolatry, to be a witness for him against an ungodly world, and preserved in his family that knowledge of God which was fast disappearing from among all the other families of the earth.

Still, for ages after this, the Church, the worshippers of the true God, were comparatively few in number ; and when they did multiply and grow, it was in a state of bitter bondage, and under the most cruel oppression, where they had to maintain a struggle for their very existence, and where the extension and triumph of the truth appeared all but hopeless. That they could be permanently overborne and utterly extirpated was indeed impossible ; for the uninterrupted existence of a Church, as well as the final triumph of the truth, was secured by Him, who was one day, as the seed of the woman, to bruise the serpent's head. And, accordingly, the low state to which the Church was frequently reduced, both as to numbers and strength, served more clearly to

demonstrate the stability of the everlasting covenant, the unchangeable faithfulness of the divine promise; for it was at such seasons that God graciously interposed in a manner which the Church could not misunderstand, and which the ungodly world itself was compelled to acknowledge to be the doing of the Lord.

It was at such a season and in such a manner that he interposed on behalf of his oppressed and weary heritage in the land of Egypt, and, with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, brought them up out of the house of bondage. It was by the same immediate interposition of his power, and with a visible manifestation of his presence, that he conducted them through the waste howling wilderness, and brought them to the border of the inheritance which he had promised and provided for them. And it was with the assurance of still further displays of his power, and new demonstrations of his faithfulness, that he encouraged Joshua to go up and take possession of that land, as at once a type and a pledge of the final triumph of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness.

But it is to be observed, that throughout the whole of this period, from the day on which the enmity of the wicked one broke forth against righteous Abel, till the day on which Joshua was addressed in the words of the passage before us, the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent never ceased. The enmity which always existed against the Church was not always manifested with the same bitterness, nor was it at all times armed with the same power. But a state of trial and endurance arising from that enmity was the state of God's people generally; and even at the memorable period here referred to, when so momentous a change was taking place in their condition,—when, from a state of obscurity and oppression, they were to be exhibited in the sight of the world, not merely as ransomed captives, but as triumphant conquerors,—when, from trembling under the dread of merciless oppressors, where the faith of the holiest of them might have been ready to fail them, they were to be placed in the commanding position in which the fear of them and the dread of them was to be put on all the nations that were round about them;—even then they were plainly and solemnly warned that the conflict was not over,—that toil and danger still

awaited them: for the exhortation which accompanied the promise was, "Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed."

But the original declaration, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed," was a warning to the Church from the beginning, that the conflict, though maintained at different times with different degrees of bitterness, never can absolutely terminate so long as mankind are divided into the two classes described in that declaration. The enmity to the truth which characterises the world of ungodly men may indeed assume a variety of aspects, according to circumstances, and according to the greater or less restraint that, in the providence of God, may be laid upon it. When occasions occur to call it into activity, and when, at the same time, it is conscious of possessing adequate power, it will manifest itself in open acts of hostility, as we have seen that it did during the period to which we have been referring.

At other times, however, it may appear in attempts to undermine the authority of divine truth, or to lower the standard of moral duty; and this is the form which it will be found generally to assume in those communities where, with the prevalence of what are called liberal sentiments, there is nevertheless, with a large class, it may even be of nominal Christians, a decided aversion to the holy and humbling doctrines of the cross. Of open persecution there may be none; but there may be a great deal of active hostility notwithstanding against the cause and the friends of vital godliness,—and a hostility not the less dangerous because it assumes the character of temptation rather than of open violence. And the enmity which characterises the seed of the serpent may exist, and that too in great strength, even where there is no outward active manifestation of it in either of the ways to which I have referred; for what is it but the enmity of the carnal mind against God,—the alienation of the natural man from holiness,—and the principle, therefore, which characterises every unrenewed heart?

And if so, then this consideration suggests, and ought to force upon every man, the very solemn question, To which of the two classes, the seed of the woman, or the seed of the serpent, do I belong? Under one or other every human being will be ulti-

mately found to rank. There can be no neutral position. The question, therefore, becomes a very definite one ; and surely too momentous to be taken for granted or hastily decided. And let none deceive themselves, therefore, by assuming that they do not belong to the one class, merely because they have never openly declared war against the Church of Christ, or bitterly opposed the cause and the friends of vital godliness,—nor have, either by their example or their influence, laboured to corrupt the moral principles of their fellow-men. They may have been laid under such restraints, by the gracious providence of God, that they have not dared to attempt, by either the one or the other of these methods, directly to injure the cause of truth and righteousness. Yet there may be in their heart a feeling of bitterness, nay, even loathing, towards all that constitutes holiness of heart and life, which, if occasion awakened it, and opportunity of exerting it occurred, would manifest itself as ferociously as ever it did in former times.

Neither let any, on the other hand, conclude that they belong to the other class, merely because they hold many opinions in common with the most godly and devout of men around them,—opinions in accordance with the truths of Scripture,—and because they look with abhorrence on the persecution and reproach which the Church of God has in all ages more or less experienced. Such opinions may be entertained and such feelings may be cherished even where the heart is unchanged, and where the natural enmity of the carnal mind against God has not been slain. Men may have been so conversant with divine truth from their youth upward, and so familiar with all the decencies of character which even a form of Christianity produces, that they are ready to stand forward and avow their adherence to great Scripture principles, when these are openly assailed ; and yet, when any thing more than bold profession of these principles is required,—when suffering is needful to maintain them,—they will be found, perhaps, not only giving them up, but bitterly opposing those who continue to maintain them.

If religion be a mere matter of opinion, then religious opinions may be formed, and, in ordinary circumstances, very plainly maintained, just as political opinions are ; and the creed thus adopted may, peradventure, be an orthodox creed, because it

may have been gathered from intercourse with orthodox or sound thinking men. But be men's opinions ever so scriptural, and be their adherence to these opinions ever so firm, they may still be but opinions, and adherence to them may be but the pride of being consistent. Even with a very fair and zealous profession, there may be lurking in the heart the unsubdued enmity of the carnal mind against God, which needs only an occasion and a sufficiently powerful motive to excite and draw it forth in active enmity against all who reflect God's image ; and it is still a question, therefore, which multitudes, even of fair professors, would do well seriously to entertain,—on which side they stand in the mighty conflict which has been going on from the beginning between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent,—between the kingdom of light, and the kingdom of darkness,—between those who fear the Lord, and those who fear him not.

And to those who have made conscience of entertaining this question, and have not rested until it has been satisfactorily determined, I need hardly remark, that the exhortation in the passage before us ought to be alike instructive and encouraging to them. Whatever may be the peace and rest which they now enjoy, they must have had a struggle in reaching it; and whatever progress they may have made in sanctification,—in a growing conformity to the image of Christ,—it must have been made in the face of much opposition, not only from the corruption of their own heart within, but from the various obstacles presented to them by a sinful world from without, aided by the artifices and the assaults of the great adversary, with whose direct enmity, as well as that of his seed, they have had to contend. They can know but little of the Christian warfare, if they are not convinced that it is a warfare which will terminate only with death; and though what they have already experienced of it may have been more an inward conflict with a depressing sense of guilt,—with the fears and misgivings to which a consciousness of guilt gives rise, and with the doubts which a legal and self-righteous spirit is ever awakening on the subject of their acceptance with God,—than an outward conflict with the opposition which a sinful world presents to a life of holiness ; yet they must be aware that there is ungodliness enough in the world, and even within the circle in

which they move, to present a very formidable opposition to their following the course on which they have entered.

They may have entered on that course at the hazard of incurring ridicule,—of losing friends,—of forfeiting the countenance and aid of those on whom they largely depended, and of thus sacrificing, to no inconsiderable extent, their worldly prospects and interests; or they may be exposed to the silent and insinuating influence of the temptation which arises from the society of worldly men,—a kind of opposition to a life of godliness, which requires more watchfulness, and, not unfrequently, more firmness to resist it, than even more openly violent opposition. But whatever may be their circumstances and condition, they must have experienced enough to convince them that they are engaged in a warfare that requires more than their own wisdom and strength to carry on. They must perceive that the history of the Church universal, and of the conflict which she has been called to maintain, does, with most wonderful accuracy, set forth the conflict of every individual member; and though they had nothing, therefore, but their own personal salvation to care for, and no other spiritual adversary to contend with but the enemies of their own personal advancement in holiness, they would stand greatly in need of the admonition in the passage before us, “Be strong, and of a good courage;” and not less so of the promise which accompanies it, “for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

LXIV.

RAHAB.

JOSHUA II. 11.

THESE words were addressed to two men of the children of Israel, and referred, therefore, to the God of Israel. They were spoken, moreover, by a heathen woman of Canaan, one who had been nurtured in idolatry, and, as it would appear, had been a partaker in all the abominations to which idolatry gives rise, or with which it is always accompanied. And, I need hardly add, that the words contain a concise but very comprehensive confession of faith, such a confession as the people of Israel themselves did not always make or adhere to. Taking, then, all these circumstances into account, the words are very remarkable words; and so they have elsewhere been declared to be, for in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle brings forward a host of witnesses to bear testimony to the truth that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," we find him saying of the person whose words are recorded in this passage, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." And that the faith of this individual was very remarkable, even among the many illustrious examples adduced by the apostle, will be abundantly obvious from a reference to her history, so far as it is given in the chapter before us. We are here told that while Joshua was yet at Shittim, on the other side of Jordan from the land of Canaan, he sent "two men to spy

secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there." In the meantime, intelligence of their arrival and also of their errand having been brought to the king of Jericho, he sent to Rahab, requiring her to bring them forth, as men who had come to spy out all the country; but instead of obeying this command, she brought the men up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof; and having thus contrived to conceal them, and to direct the search of her townsmen to another quarter, she took the two spies, and "let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall."

That the men of Israel should have been thus concealed, and then aided in their escape by one whom they would naturally regard as an enemy, and who, on discovering who they were, might have been supposed not only ready but forward to deliver them up, and that all this should have been done by her at the manifest peril of her own life, was assuredly an act of kindness which they had little reason to look for, and which might well have filled them with amazement. But the reason which she gave for acting as she did was perhaps still more unexpected and surprising. "Before they were laid down," we are told, "she came up unto them upon the roof; and she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you." So far her description of the effects produced by the approach of Israel to the confines of Canaan was common to her and her countrymen generally, for all were alike filled with consternation at the appearance of the hosts of Israel. But she goes on, in the words of the passage under consideration, to express a conviction which was peculiar to herself, as subsequent events showed: "For," says she, "the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above,

and in earth beneath." And in testimony of the depth as well as the reality of this conviction, she proceeds to peril her all on the certainty of what she professed to believe: "Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death." With this proposal the men readily complied, pledging their lives for hers if she uttered not the business for which they had come; and, having agreed on a certain mark by which her house was to be distinguished when the Israelites should take Jericho, and having settled the conditions on which their oath was to be binding or not, they returned to Joshua, and said, "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us." The sequel of Rahab's history is recorded in a subsequent chapter, where we are told that when the Israelites took Jericho, and utterly destroyed all that was in the city, "Joshua said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. . . And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."

Such is an outline of the history of this remarkable individual. And we are naturally led to ask, What point in that history does the apostle especially refer to, when he says, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not?" It may appear, perhaps, at first sight, that her preservation is sufficiently accounted for by the agreement which she entered into with the spies,—that it was just such an agreement as mere worldly wisdom might in the circumstances have dictated,—that having interposed for their protection when their lives were in jeopardy, and having done so, moreover, at the imminent peril of her own life, she thought herself entitled to reckon on a similar interpo-

sition on their part in the hour of her need;—and that thus the confidence which she felt respecting her deliverance from the danger that threatened her, rested on the gratitude of those to whom she had rendered so signal a service, and on their fidelity in fulfilling the oath which they had solemnly sworn to her. But though this agreement with the spies was, no doubt, the immediate cause of her protection, and though she could not but feel that her safety was suspended on their being faithful to their promise; still, the confidence that was placed in mere human testimony, however strong or well founded, was not faith, and could not, therefore, be the confidence which the apostle has ascribed to her. And there is enough in this passage, as well as in the general tenor of her history, to show that it were a very unworthy view of her character to suppose that her hope of safety rested entirely or mainly on any such foundation;—nay, that in so far as she did rely on the fidelity of the spies, it was because she regarded their pledge as coming to her from God, and believed that he would not permit it to fail of being redeemed.

Her faith did not originate in the promise of the spies. It was manifested in the interpretation which she put on the events which had befallen Israel, and in the just inferences which she drew from these events. Having heard of the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt; their passage through the Red Sea; their preservation in the wilderness; their triumphs over Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites; and their approach to the very confines of Canaan,—she saw, in the deliverances thus wrought for them, the manifestation of a power altogether different from any thing that the gods of the nations had ever exercised on behalf of their votaries; and she yielded to the obvious, and to her irresistible conviction, that the Lord God of Israel was “God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” Having heard, moreover, as appears from the history, that the God of the Israelites had promised to give them the land of Canaan for their possession,—that this was the avowed object of their journey from Egypt through the wilderness,—and that he had already given them an earnest of their final success, in their victories over Og and Sihon, she was as irresistibly led to the conclusion, that this promise would infallibly be fulfilled, and

that no human skill or courage could avail any thing towards defeating it. So far, then, she was exercising faith; inasmuch as she was believing the testimony which God, by his mighty works, had borne to his being, his supremacy, and his declared purposes respecting the people whom he had selected and separated for his own. And so far, also, this revelation of God's character and sovereignty had produced on her mind the very effect which it was fitted and designed to produce among the heathen; for it was the declared purpose of all God's doings on behalf of Israel, that "they might be unto him for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory,"—"that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord that it is mighty."

But neither did Rahab's faith terminate in the first great fundamental truths, that the God of Israel was the only living and true God, and that he would assuredly fulfil all that he had promised to his people. She resolved at the same time to separate herself from her countrymen, who still maintained the attitude of resistance to what she saw to be a divine power, and to cast herself on the compassion or generosity of the people who, as she believed, were to become the possessors of Canaan. And this resolution she adopted and acted upon in circumstances which clearly showed that her hope of being received among them, and saved from the general destruction that was coming on her idolatrous countrymen, rested on the views which she had been led to entertain of the character and perfections of God. She waited not till she should see the issue of the first conflict between Israel and the men of Jericho, or till the former appeared in strength before the walls of the city. Nay, she did not even attempt to stipulate with the spies themselves for their interest on her behalf, in order to determine what course she was to pursue. Before any such stipulation was proposed, she had actually perilled her life for their safety; and when she did request of them that they would deal kindly by her, and interpose for her protection, her proposal was introduced with a solemn, and evidently a most sincere and honest profession of her faith,—her conviction that God would assuredly give them the land, for that he was God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath.

It is true, she did avail herself of the kindness which she

had showed to them, for the purpose of securing their kindness in return ; and thus, as faith will always prompt, she employed the lawful means which the providence of God had thrown in her way for obtaining the object hoped for. But though she looked to the spies as the instrument by which her safety was to be immediately provided for, she looked to a higher power as the agency that was to operate by them on her behalf ; and her confidence, therefore, rested on a surer foundation than the mere faithfulness of a fellow-creature's promise. She had chosen the God of Israel to be her God, in the room of her former idols. Nor was her faith without an approving testimony on the part of God. Though, as we have seen, the spies whom she had saved did redeem their pledge, and, by the express command of Joshua, were employed personally in rescuing Rahab and her household from the tumult of the conflict, and carrying them to a place of safety ; yet, previous to this, there was an immediate and a very remarkable interposition of divine power on her behalf. In the account which we have, in a subsequent chapter, of the taking of Jericho, it is said that when the Israelites had compassed the city on the seventh day seven times, and when the priests blew with the trumpets, and the people shouted with a loud shout, "the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." But we are told respecting Rahab,—and the fact is very prominently brought forward,—that "her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall." And must we not conclude, therefore, that the preservation of her house in such circumstances was the interposition of a divine agency,—an honourable attestation to her character, as one who, amidst the universal idolatry of her countrymen, put her trust in the living God, and, therefore, "perished not with them that believed not?"

But if we would estimate aright the strength of Rahab's faith, and the full import of the confession contained in this passage, or if we would rightly understand the interesting and salutary instruction which it conveys, we must advert a little more particularly to the circumstances in which she was placed. It would appear from the history that she originally belonged to Jericho, or the neighbourhood ; and, therefore, she was not only a Gentile, but an Amorite,—an individual of one of those nations

whose destruction had been revealed to Abraham four hundred years before: and she lived at the time when the iniquity of these nations was full, and when God had actually begun to bring upon them his righteous judgments. Living, then, in such a country, and at such a time, she could only be familiar with all that was most offensive in the sight of God, and debasing to the character of man. Addicted to an abominable and degrading superstition,—even such idolatry as called for an immediate manifestation of divine power to put it down,—she could not be supposed to entertain any right or honourable apprehension of those attributes which are essential to the divine nature; and being accustomed only to what was vicious in moral conduct, it might have been expected that she would be as unwilling to hear of such attributes if they were presented to her, as she was herself unable to discover or conceive of them. And that she was herself personally implicated in all the abominations which characterised her countrymen is plainly intimated by the designation which is here and elsewhere in Scripture given to her.

Such, then, being her character and condition, nothing, humanly speaking, would appear more unlikely than that she should be affected by what she heard of the mighty works of God, in any other way than her countrymen around her were, when, under the influence of a slavish terror, their hearts did melt, and there remained no more courage in them; while, at the same time, their enmity against God was still unsubdued and unbroken. And, indeed, the effect which the report of these miracles produced upon her mind can be accounted for only by resolving it into the sovereignty of Him whose prerogative it is, that “he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” That such an effect was produced in her case as wrought an entire revolution in her views of every thing that does most nearly and deeply concern mankind as accountable creatures, is abundantly obvious. Her eyes were opened to the great fundamental truth, that there is but one God, the God in heaven above, and in earth beneath; and she saw, therefore, that she had till then been placing her confidence in dumb idols, that could not deliver or help her in the time of need,—that in doing so, she had been withholding from the true God that homage to which he alone was entitled,—and that

there was no safety for her but in the favour and friendship of the God of Israel. All this is implied in the confession recorded in the passage under consideration, and in the decided part which she took : for it is evident from her whole history, that she not only expected, as a thing of absolute certainty, that the judgment of God was coming on the land, but regarded it also as a holy and righteous judgment ; and she could not do so without seeing the guilt of her former idolatry.

But the strength of her faith was still more marvellously displayed in the hope which she entertained of finding a place among the people of God, and in the confidence with which she threw herself on the divine protection, when she hazarded her life for the sake of the two spies, while as yet she knew nothing of how the Israelites might be disposed towards her. As a Gentile, she was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger to the covenants of promise. She had received nothing like a direct revelation to warrant the hope that she might participate in the blessings and privileges of the children of Abraham. All the miracles and mighty works of which she had heard had been wrought exclusively for the deliverance and protection of the people of Israel. And though, in his dealings with them, God had appeared merciful and gracious, slow to anger, of long-suffering, abundant in goodness, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin ; to the other nations, and especially to her own, he appeared in the character of an holy, and righteous, and sin-avenging God. Yet, in the absence of such encouragements as Israel had to put their trust in him,—or rather in spite of the many discouragements which might have been suggested to her,—she did, nevertheless, withdraw her confidence from the false gods whom she had till then served, and ventured her all on the grace and mercy of the God of Israel.

It appears as if she had derived, from what had been reported of God's dealings with his people, very enlarged and enlightened views of his character,—as if she had discovered that the great purpose of exalting Israel was to put down idolatry,—that he had already borne long and patiently with the nations which had turned from him to serve and honour dumb idols,—that the destruction of the impenitent inhabitants of Canaan was a necessary vindication of his sovereignty as the Ruler of the universe,—

and that it might still be consistent with his character to receive a returning Gentile, as well as to take the family of Abraham under his holy guardianship. But whatever might be the extent of her views as to the great principle of the divine dealings with men, it is evident that she did from that moment know and acknowledge no other god but the God of Israel; and taking into account her circumstances and condition, and bearing in mind that she had never personally witnessed and never actually participated in the benefit of the many miracles that were wrought to command the confidence of the people of God, does not her faith present a striking contrast to the distrust and disobedience with which they were so frequently chargeable? And may it not be said of her, as our Lord at a subsequent period said of another believing Gentile, that there was "not found so great faith, no, not in Israel?"

The practical lesson which this view of Rahab's character and conduct suggests is very obvious. It cannot fail to minister to every serious inquirer abundant encouragement and consolation, and to some, perhaps, salutary reproof. It appears, from the history before us, that the Israelites were not a little encouraged and animated, at the commencement of their enterprise, by the intelligence which the spies received from Rahab respecting the alarm which pervaded the inhabitants of Canaan on their account; for when they returned again to Joshua, and reported to him all that they had seen and experienced, we find them adopting the language of high hope and confidence, and expressing that confidence, moreover, in the very terms in which Rahab had spoken to them of the conquest of the land. "Truly," said they, "the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us." But while the testimony which Rahab bore to the fact, that the fear of them and the dread of them had fallen on the inhabitants of Canaan, did, no doubt, contribute largely to their encouragement, it can be as little doubted that the confidence which she expressed as to the issue of the approaching conflict did also operate powerfully in animating all, and in reproofing many; for when they saw a woman, herself one of the people who were doomed to destruction, who had never witnessed, as they had, the actual manifestation of the mighty power of God,

and who, to all appearance, had no other ground of hope that she should escape destruction than the fidelity of Israel to the promise of their spies;—when they saw such a person manifesting the firmest persuasion that God would assuredly fulfil all that he had promised, how must they have felt rebuked at the recollection of all the fears and misgivings to which they had given way, in the prospect of the contest that awaited them ! and how must they have felt excited and strengthened by such an example of full and firm confidence in the divine faithfulness !

It was thus, I conceive, that Rahab was honoured to minister both instruction and reproof to Israel : and her example is still fitted to accomplish the same important object in the case of believers now ; for when we contrast the limited nature of that revelation of the divine character which she had received, with the full and clear manifestation of the grace and mercy of God now unfolded in the Gospel, how powerfully does her example speak to the convicted, the perplexed, and those who feel themselves to be weary and heavy laden ! and how powerfully should they feel urged by it to cast themselves on the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus ! She, too, was convicted, and sorely pressed with a sense of danger. But she did not sit down in indolent and useless, not to say sinful, despondency. Though with little, very little of the encouragement now presented to sinners, she unhesitatingly ventured her all on the grace of the God of Israel, though till then she had experienced only his forbearance, having received no such direct assurance as sinners now have of his willingness to pardon. And how severely does the reception that she met with reprove the unworthy suspicions of those who still feel and act as if it were doubtful whether the salvation of the Gospel is freely offered to them individually ! I fear that there is more of this unbelief than many are aware of at the foundation of what sometimes assumes the appearance of humility,—and that it is unbelief which may be resolved into pride,—an unwillingness to acknowledge, even to themselves, that they are absolutely helpless and undone. For were they as thoroughly convinced that such is their state, as Rahab was that the judgment of God was coming upon Canaan, would they not, like Rahab, be ready to convert any, even the slightest, encouragement which they could find

anywhere addressed to sinners, into an invitation addressed to themselves personally? And if Rahab found such an encouragement even in the partial revelation which she then had of the divine character, and did by faith lay hold on and appropriate it to herself, oh, how abundant should be the consolation,—how lively the hope,—and how steadfast the peace of those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed,—and who are there invited, in the plainest and most affectionate language which love can dictate, and encouraged by promises as sure as the unchangeable faithfulness of God can make them, to come to Christ, and he will in no wise cast them out!

But there is another point of view in which it may be instructive to contemplate the history of Rahab,—I mean, as throwing light on the principle of the divine dealings with the nations of Canaan. These dealings, I believe, have often been regarded as entirely inflictions of judgment,—as giving Israel a commission so absolute as to admit of no mitigation or exception in the execution of it; and, therefore, as presenting nothing but an irrevocable decree, cutting off those nations from all hope of forgiveness, or even of respite. Humble readers of the Bible would tremble at the thought of questioning the justice of God in all this. But even such persons may be perplexed in contrasting it with the forbearance and long-suffering which characterise God's dealings with mankind generally. But, in truth, the divine forbearance was signally manifested towards these very nations of Canaan; and, even in their case, judgment, though in the end very terrible, was nevertheless God's strange work. As far back as the calling of Abraham, nearly five hundred years before the period referred to in this passage, and when the flood,—that awful revelation of the righteous judgment of God,—ought to have exercised a solemnising influence on men's minds, the Amorites, or inhabitants of Canaan, had already fallen away from the worship of the true God; for Abraham was then told that the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full, and that four hundred years more of respite would be given to them, before his posterity should get possession of the land.

In the meantime, they were not left without many solemn warnings of the fatal consequences of forgetting and forsaking God. Abraham continued long, as did Isaac and Jacob after

him, to sojourn in their land. Wherever he went, he built an altar, and called on the name of the Lord, the only living and true God ; and from the way in which Abraham was prospered, it was very obvious that God was with him. Everybody can recollect events in the history of Abraham which must have attracted the notice of the people of the land, and might have convinced them that the God of Abraham was God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. But if there had been nothing else, his rescuing the king of Sodom and his people from captivity, and his declaration on that memorable occasion, left that guilty people without excuse when it did not turn them from those abominations which, not long after, drew down upon them the judgment of God,—even fire and brimstone from heaven till they were consumed. It was not, then, without many opportunities of knowing the true God, many intimations of his will, and many warnings of his coming judgments, that the nations of Canaan continued to degenerate. Even when the light which had long emanated from the family of Abraham was withdrawn by Jacob and his family going down into Egypt, which was itself a judgment on Canaan,—for what can be a judgment on a nation, if the withdrawal of the light of divine truth from it be not so?—even after this, and when the family of Abraham returned from Egypt to take possession of Canaan, according to the promise, many new warnings were given to these nations. Many mighty works were done in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, of all which they had heard, and in which they might have seen intimations of coming retribution, as Rahab saw them. Nay, when the hour of that retribution appeared to have arrived, and Israel were on the very borders of Canaan, their perverseness and unbelief prevented them from taking possession of it, and for nearly forty years a new respite was granted to the inhabitants of Canaan.

Yet, in spite of all this, they continued impenitent; and the history of Rahab stands a recorded testimony, confirmed by the fear and dread which fell upon them on account of Israel, that they perished because they wilfully shut their eyes to the clearest demonstrations of God's sovereignty, and the most unequivocal intimations of his will; for while Rahab saw in the Israelites the armies of the living God, commissioned to vindicate his ho-

nour, and assert his prerogatives as the Lawgiver and sovereign Ruler, and, under this conviction, turned from idolatry to the true God, her countrymen, with the same evidence before them, impiously defied divine power, and, though filled with terror, retained all their malignity against the divine authority. It was through obstinate unbelief, then, in the face of all the evidence which the most stupendous miracles could furnish, that the inhabitants of Canaan perished. "By faith . . . Rahab perished not with them that believed not." I am aware that, in such a case, there may be a great impropriety in supposing that things might have been otherwise than they were, and that it is not befitting, but might be very presumptuous, to say, that if they had believed as Rahab did, they would also have been spared as she was. For so certain was their impenitence, in the divine foreknowledge, that the period at which their iniquity should be full was expressly foretold, and their destruction by the hand of Israel had all the certainty of a divine purpose. Still, the case before us is an illustration of the general testimony of Scripture, that unbelief is the immediate cause of ruin; and thus the most unsparing of the judgments which God ever inflicted on man bear the clearest testimony to his forbearance and mercy, inasmuch as these judgments show, that be the sins of men what they may, there is forgiveness for the believing, penitent sinner, and that to those who hear the Gospel, "unbelief alone makes eternal destruction inevitable and remediless."

LXV.

THE ARK IN THE MIDST OF JORDAN.

JOSHUA III. 17.

THESE words record an event very interesting in itself, but especially so when viewed in connection with the preceding history of Israel. From the day that the Lord appeared unto Abraham in Canaan, and said to him, "Unto thy seed will I give this land," the fulfilment of the promise then made, and afterwards frequently repeated, was looked forward to with firm confidence by the patriarch himself, and with longing expectation by his believing children after him. That fulfilment, however, was delayed from age to age; and at the end of four hundred and thirty years, during which the descendants of Abraham had been only sojourners,—first in Canaan, and afterwards in Egypt,—it was, to all appearance, more hopeless than ever.

But God's appointed time was then come; and, therefore, in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, he brought Israel out of Egypt, so multiplied in numbers as to be sufficient to occupy the land promised to them through their fathers. Yet even after this mighty deliverance, when, to all appearance, and in reality, nothing lay between them and the long-promised land but a few weeks', or, at the most, a few months' travel through the wilderness which lay between Egypt and Canaan, new obstacles to their progress towards and their possession of the promised inheritance were raised up by their own unbelief and rebellion; and instead of a journey which, even

with the long encampment at Sinai, would not much have exceeded a year, till it brought them to the borders of Canaan, they were compelled to wander forty years in the wilderness, till the whole generation of them, from twenty years old and upward, had wasted and died there. And during these forty years, moreover, they were in greater danger of being disinherited, and cut off as a people, than they had ever before been, even amidst all the oppression and bitter bondage of Egypt; for once and again God said to Moses, "Let me alone, that I may consume them;" "and I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

But the intercession of Moses prevailed to avert the threatened judgment; and in spite of their unbelief and disobedience, God carried forward his own work, and proved himself to be the faithful and covenant-keeping God, by fulfilling his promise to Abraham, notwithstanding the many acts of rebellion whereby the patriarch's children forfeited all right to the inheritance promised to their father. God did not, indeed, put the unbelieving and openly rebellious in possession of that inheritance; for these were consumed in the wilderness. But their children, who had been gradually brought into a state of humble and child-like submission, partly by the discipline which they had themselves undergone, and partly by the solemn warning held out to them in the judgments executed on their brethren,—these, by God's good hand upon them, survived all the perils of the wilderness, and all the dangers to which they were exposed by the hostility of the nations which opposed their progress towards the border of Canaan, until, as the passage under consideration informs us, they passed over Jordan on dry ground, even all the people passed clean over Jordan.

Here, then, we have the fulfilment of the promise given nearly five hundred years before to Abraham,—and a fulfilment brought about in such a way as to leave no doubt that it was the immediate doing of the same gracious God who had made the promise to the patriarch. Literally, indeed, the promise was not yet fulfilled in all its extent; for though Israel, according to the statement in the passage before us, had entered Canaan, yet many a severe and protracted conflict awaited them before they conquered and took possession of it. But when we consider the

long period that had elapsed from the time when the promise was first given,—the many circumstances and events which occurred, from time to time, to render its fulfilment the most unlikely thing that could be conceived,—the many interpositions of divine power that were employed to remove these apparently insurmountable obstacles,—and the marvellous manner in which the people of Israel were carried over the last of these obstacles that lay in their way to the promised inheritance,—we cannot but regard the fact stated in this passage as in reality the fulfilment of the divine promise to Abraham ; inasmuch as, after the lapse of many generations, and in spite of innumerable and apparently insurmountable obstacles, we see the whole living descendants of the patriarch, to whom the promise applied, without one wanting, standing a mighty multitude on the plains of Jericho, within the territory of which the Lord had said, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.”

After such experience of the divine faithfulness and power, every believing Israelite must have felt that Canaan was virtually conquered and possessed, inasmuch as nothing but unbelief on their part could prevent them from triumphantly entering on the purchased inheritance. And such, especially, must have been the feeling of all who could recollect the bitterness of the bondage to which they were subjected in Egypt. To them, the history of the forty years immediately preceding the marvellous event recorded in the passage before us, must have been the most interesting of all that had been recorded by Moses. They could not, indeed, be ignorant of God’s gracious dealings with their fathers, nor could they fail to listen with interest while Moses rehearsed to them the mighty acts of the Lord, both of mercy and of judgment, from the beginning, down to the period at which they themselves began to be the special objects of his merciful interpositions.

But the period between the morning on which they left Egypt, and the hour at which they found themselves standing on the plains of Jericho, in the land of Canaan, must have occupied the chief place in their recollection of all God’s dealings. The consideration by which they were induced to brave the anger of the king of Egypt, and to put themselves under the guidance of Moses, was the promise and the prospect of being brought into

a good land and a large,—a land flowing with milk and honey ; and when, after a pilgrimage of sin and suffering, extending to forty years' duration, they were at last placed in that land, with the direct command from God himself, "Go up, and possess it," they must have felt, not only that the promise given to them had been fulfilled, and the prospect held out to them realised, but that the history of God's dealings with them during these forty years constituted a complete history in itself, apart from all that preceded and all that was to follow it,—a history in the course of which God had clearly unfolded the great principles of his divine administration in regard to the Church, his chosen and ransomed people.

Nor can it be doubted that the events which befell Israel during that period, besides forming a part of the history of the Church, were intended also to illustrate God's manner of dealing with his people in all ages, being so ordered and overruled as to furnish an example of the discipline through which they pass, and by which they are gradually prepared for an inheritance of glory. It is plain, from many intimations of Scripture, that Canaan was designed to be a type of that inheritance ; while the pilgrimage of Israel in the wilderness was designed in like manner to set forth the experience of believers,—their sin and their suffering, their trials and their triumphs,—and God's manner of dealing with them in the way both of mercy and of judgment. All this, indeed, must be felt by every true believer who seriously peruses the history of Israel, from their departure out of Egypt till their arrival in Canaan ; for the apostle himself has taught us so to regard and improve that history, when he says, "All these things happened unto them for types : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

In this view of the subject, then, the passage of Jordan by the Israelites,—those who did not through unbelief fall in the wilderness,—is to be regarded as representing the death of believers. Concerning those who, in consequence of unbelief, perished in the wilderness, and so came short of Canaan, it is said by God, "So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest." Canaan was thus called God's rest ; and the apostle applies the same term to the heavenly inheritance, when, referring to the unbelief of Israel, he says, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a

promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." And again, "Seeing . . . it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief : . . . let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

But as Israel were required to pass Jordan before they could enter into the promised rest, so believers must pass through the valley of the shadow of death before they can reach the rest which remaineth for the people of God. And the former of these events is not merely a typical representation of the latter. In the account here given of it, believers may find much important instruction, as well as great encouragement and consolation in the prospect of death. Care was obviously taken to convey to the Israelites the impression, that the passage of Jordan was a very solemn event, inasmuch as special instructions were given to them both as to the previous preparation which was necessary to be made for it, and the manner in which it was to be accomplished. When "they removed from Shittim," we are told, "and came to Jordan," Joshua and all the children of Israel "lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host ; and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure : come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go : for ye have not passed this way heretofore. And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves : for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

In all this, believers are taught that death is ever to be regarded as a very solemn event ; and that when it approaches, it will be felt to be so, even by those who have the fullest assurance that to them it will be the entrance to the land of promise,—the full and no longer interrupted enjoyment of the rest which remaineth for the people of God, and of which they have already had a foretaste even on this side Jordan. Death, indeed, as the manifestation of God's displeasure against sin, never can be contemplated by those who have been taught to form

some right estimate of sin on the one hand, and of the displeasure of God on the other, but with a feeling of solemn awe. Slavish dread there may be none; but seriousness and solemnity of mind there must be. And if they would not be oppressed with fear, they must, like Israel, be prepared, when the signal is given, to remove from their place. They must be seeking, habitually, to sanctify themselves,—to be growing in meetness for an event which may at any moment take place,—to bear continually in mind the solemn admonition, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

But if the history before us thus warns believers to be always prepared for death, it is, at the same time, full of instruction as to the way in which they may be so prepared, and rich in consolation and encouragement as assuring them of a safe passage through the dark valley. The command to Israel was, “When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it;” and it was, at the same time, said to them, “And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.” And, accordingly, as the passage before us informs us, “The priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.”

This was, no doubt, a very sublime spectacle,—a glorious display of the presence, and power, and absolute sovereignty of the Lord God of Israel,—such a manifestation of the divine faithfulness and might as would impart, not only courage, but confidence in passing under the wall of waters which threatened to overwhelm them. But still, with all its sublimity and grandeur, it was, at the same time, typical of transactions far more glorious. The ark of the covenant was itself a type of Christ; and when it was carried down by the priests into Jordan, it prefigured the most stupendous of all the events that ever occurred in the universe of God,—even the incarnation of the Eternal Word,—the death and burial of the man Jesus Christ, of whom the apostle says, in quoting the prediction of his ascension to glory,

“Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” Many are the occasions on which the ark of the covenant is set forth in Scripture as typifying Christ; but nowhere is it more plainly and emphatically represented in this character than in the passage before us, where it prefigures the death of Christ, and explains, at the same time, the effects of that death, as these are experienced by his redeemed people.

It was by the descent of the ark into the depths of Jordan that a way was opened up for Israel into the land of promise,—the rest of God; and it was in consequence of the descent of Christ into the lower parts of the earth that a way has been opened up for all whom the Father has given him into the heavenly Canaan,—the land of everlasting rest. From that land all were shut out by a sentence which doomed them to perpetual banishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,—and in this state of bondage to sin and death they must have for ever remained, had not Christ undertaken their deliverance. And when he did undertake it, it was not merely to be present with his people in the hour of death, and, by his divine power, to sustain them in that season of darkness;—there was infinitely more in his undertaking than merely the exercise of omnipotence, as in the case before us, when at his presence “Jordan was driven back;”—even that never could have been done for such a purpose as it was done for,—namely, the entrance of Israel into the rest of God,—but for the sure, the infallibly certain fulfilment, at a future period, of the work which Christ had undertaken for redeeming sinners by his own obedience unto the death.

In like manner, Christ could not now be present with and sustaining believers in their passage through the dark valley of the shadow of death, unless he had at the appointed time finished the work which his Father gave him to do. But for the accomplishment of that work, the valley of death must have been to every sinner an interminable valley,—even a state of utter and everlasting darkness. And the work which was given him,—which from the beginning was as certainly to be finished as if it had been so, and which has now been actually finished,—was a very different thing from the mere exercise or putting forth of

an irresistible, an almighty power. It needed nothing more, indeed, than mere power to accomplish the marvellous work recorded in the passage before us, when "Jordan was driven back . . . at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." But this was done on the strength of what Christ, the great Antitype of the ark, was at a future period to endure, when he was to be constrained to cry out, under the overwhelming load of divine wrath due to sin, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

In like manner, it is a mere act of power,—an exercise of omnipotence put forth without effort, nay, with infinite facility,—if Christ now stands by his people at the hour of death, and sustains and refreshes their fainting spirits by the communications of his grace,—by the animating and encouraging assurance, "Fear not, for I am with thee." But he never could have done this,—for it would not have been consistent with the rectitude of the divine character and the honour of the divine law so to have dealt with guilty, dying men,—unless he had himself endured death, as his redeemed people never will know or endure it,—even death as the wages of sin, the infliction of divine wrath due to the guilty,—unless he could himself say, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" It was in virtue of his having engaged by solemn covenant to endure all this that he exercised his almighty power on behalf of Israel of old; and it is in virtue of his having since actually endured it all that he now exercises the same power on behalf of his believing people, when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death. And all that he so endured is most significantly prefigured by the descent of the ark of the covenant into the depths of Jordan,—a type of Him who, in his death and burial, descended into the lower parts of the earth.

But how consoling, how animating, how full of encouragement is the thought, that the conflict which Christ now maintains with

his enemies, and the enemies of his people, is a conflict of mere power, and that in his mediatorial character all power has been committed to him in heaven and in earth! Had nothing but power been necessary to redeem his people, the work of redemption had been an easy work. A word of that omnipotent voice which spoke the world into being could have restrained or conquered,—nay, if needful, could have annihilated,—the powers of darkness, whereby man had been ruined and enthralled; and the same word which at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness could have imparted light, and life, and holiness, and blessedness to the darkened understandings,—the spiritually dead, sinful, and miserable souls of fallen men.

But mere omnipotence, though it created a world out of nothing, could not redeem a world of lost souls. The justice of God behoved to be satisfied,—his law required to be vindicated,—the honour of his divine government could not bear to be insulted with impunity. The penalty of sin, therefore, could not be remitted. The alternative was unavoidable:—either sinners must perish, or the mediator, if a mediator were allowed, must bear the infliction of that penalty in their room. And Christ did accordingly bear it,—thereby removing the obstacle that would have prevented him from exercising his almighty power on behalf of his people as often as their necessities required his gracious interposition. Hence it is said of him, that “through death,”—by his own death, by dying,—“he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;” that he “spoiled principalities and powers,” and “made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross;” and that because he was thus obedient unto death, God has “highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” And in accordance with what is typified in the passage before us, we are told that one of the effects, or rather one of the special purposes for which Christ by his own death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, was, that he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The apostle's words are a beautiful commentary on the passage before us. They assure believers that when they go down into Jordan, they will find the ark before them there,—even Christ himself, the great Antitype of the ark,—to do for them all that the type, the visible ark, did for Israel of old, when it cut off the waters of Jordan, and permitted them to pass over on dry ground. But if they would have confidence in this exercise of his power, whereby he promises to sustain and support them in the last hour of their trial, and give them the victory over their last enemy, they must seek to cherish a lively apprehension of the victory which he has already won for them, not by an act of power, but by his patient endurance even unto the death. If they would reckon with confidence on Christ being with them when they enter the dark valley, to lead them in the unknown and untried way which they never passed before, they must remember and dwell on the great truth, that it is not an unknown and untried way to Him,—that he has passed it heretofore,—and that it is in virtue of his having done so that he can go with them when they come to pass it. If he is to be with them, when all else must forsake or be separated from them,—and when they are to feel as solitary as if there were not another being in existence but God, the righteous Lawgiver, and themselves,—if, in these solemn circumstances, when they enter the dark valley, on the other side of which they are to meet this Lawgiver and Judge, they can reckon on Christ being with them, to bring them to God, to introduce them into the presence chamber of the King of kings, to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, it is because by his death he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

But have not all true believers experienced enough of the fruits of Christ's victory which he won by his death, to give them a very strong assurance, at least a very lively and animating hope, that he will be by them at their death? So the Israelites might have felt regarding the passage of Jordan,—those of them, especially, who remembered their passage through the Red Sea. We might suppose, indeed, that to all such there would be nothing very formidable in crossing a mere river, flooded

though it was far beyond its usual size, after having encountered all the terrors of the mighty deep. This, perhaps, will be found to be a rash conclusion, and very wide of the truth. But to believers, who are inclined to think that passing Jordan was a small matter compared with going through the Red Sea, I would say, Have not you, too, experienced somewhat of a similar deliverance to that which Israel experienced when they went up out of the midst of the sea, the waters having been a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left? When you were under convictions of sin,—oppressed with a sense of guilt, which you could not throw off,—and sinking under a feeling of your helplessness, was there not before you a prospect as appalling as that which presented itself to Israel when they were about to descend into the yawning depth of the Red Sea? And when, by a believing view of Christ as the pillar of fire,—the almighty and unerring Guide,—you first felt the hope of escape from the flood that threatened to overwhelm you,—and when, by laying hold on him, you were brought from the fearful pit and from the miry clay; was not your deliverance as wonderful in your eyes as that of Israel was in theirs? and were you not ready, like them, to give utterance to your feelings in a song of gratitude and praise? And if so, can you be alarmed, or depressed, or in fear, at the prospect of passing Jordan?

Yes, you may. When Israel found themselves in safety on the other side of the sea, and beheld their enemies,—those who would have kept them in bondage,—dead upon the shore, their heart had room for no other feeling than that of admiration and joy. They fancied that all their enemies were conquered,—that all their difficulties were surmounted,—that all their trials were at an end,—or, if other trials did still await them, they flattered themselves that after what they had already undergone, they were prepared to meet these trials without dismay, and either to overcome them without difficulty or to endure them without murmuring. But a very short time and a very little experience proved that they had greatly overrated the strength of their resolutions. Their subsequent history furnished melancholy evidence in abundance how little prepared they were to encounter the perils and hardships of the wilderness; and, after the discipline of forty years, we find them, in a very subdued frame of

mind, on the banks of the Jordan, standing in need of all the encouragement which the assurances of Joshua and the presence of the ark could give them to venture on passing through it. All this, I think, is evident from the calm and humble manner in which they observed the instructions which were delivered to them, and from the absence of every thing like the excitement which they manifested on their coming up out of the Red Sea.

And so it may be with believers still. When they first experience deliverance from the terrors of divine wrath,—when they can, with some degree of confidence, say, “The Lord brought me up . . . out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God,”—they think themselves ready, under the influence of their first love, to endure any trial or to encounter any danger. But they are soon taught, in their bitter experience, how weak they are; and, from a state of self-confidence, they are in danger of falling back into a state of doubt and unbelief. In so far as their experience has taught them to distrust themselves, the lesson is a most wholesome and important one. But let them not distrust Him who has already done such great things for them. Let them not doubt, that, having brought them through the floods that were ready to overwhelm them and sink them into despair, He will be present with them while they pass the river which alone separates them from the promised land. They may be naturally timid,—weak in mental vigour, and feeble in bodily frame. But many such there must have been among Israel of old. Yet none of them perished in Jordan. As the strongest could not have passed but by the divine power which accompanied the ark of the covenant, so that power was adequate to carry over even the feeblest in safety. And so it did; for “the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.” The feeblest believer, therefore, if exercising faith in Christ, may say with the psalmist, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

LXVI.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST.

JOSHUA V. 13-15.

THIS passage marks the commencement of a very interesting portion of the history of the Church. The record of the immediately preceding forty years,—that is, from the departure of Israel out of Egypt to their arrival in Canaan,—may be considered as forming a complete history in itself; and a history, moreover, full of the most important instruction. In the course of that period God was pleased, in his dealings with Israel, to exhibit a very full and clear manifestation of the great principles of his moral government in regard both to the world and to the Church, asserting his sovereignty as the only living and true God, demonstrating his supremacy as the almighty Ruler in heaven above and on the earth beneath, and vindicating his rectitude and truth both in the infliction of judgment on the impenitent, and in the fulfilment of his promises to his own people.

All this, no doubt, was done by immediate and miraculous interpositions, which are not his usual mode of procedure. But the miraculous nature of his dealings served only to place beyond all doubt or controversy the great truth, that the dealings were his,—to render it impossible either for the world or the Church to ascribe them to any other than to Him who speaketh, and it is done, who commandeth, and all things stand fast. The miraculous manner of executing his purposes did not affect these

purposes themselves, or the principles on which they were founded ; and the history of Israel, therefore, during the period referred to, was just a miraculous manifestation of what God continues still to do, in the way both of judgment and mercy, in the ordinary course of his providence.

And believers will readily recognise and acknowledge this truth. They will see, in the history of the people of Israel, a representation of their own spiritual history, so vividly portrayed as to be less a type than a reality. The bondage of Egypt, under which Israel groaned,—their escape from that bondage,—the fear and doubting of the people before they took the solemn resolution of going forward at the bidding of Moses, —their varied experience in the wilderness, sometimes rejoicing in a sense of the divine favour, and often, through their unbelief, suffering under sharp chastisement, and finally passing Jordan in safety, and encamping in the land of Canaan,—all this will speak so directly to the actual experience, to the fears and hopes of believers, as to leave no doubt on their mind that the history was designed to set forth their spiritual history.

They will see therein the representation or type of the worse than Egyptian bondage under which they naturally lay to the power of sin and Satan,—the painful struggle, it may be, through which they passed, before they took the decided step of forsaking the world for Christ,—their occasional seasons of spiritual joy and gladness, especially on their first deliverance from the fear of coming wrath,—and their many seasons, perhaps, of depression when unbelief prevailed, and times of sorrow and sadness when visited with needful chastisement. And amidst all this they will see, in the arrival of Israel at last in Canaan, the object that has kept alive their hope, and imparted new courage to their heart, even the prospect of a similar termination of their wilderness pilgrimage, when Christ himself, the great Antitype of the ark, will divide Jordan for them,—conduct them in safety through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and bring them into the promised land, even the heavenly Canaan, where the manna which supported them in the wilderness,—even the ordinances of grace,—will cease, because they are no longer needed, and when, in the full fruition of God himself, they will eat of the fruit of the heavenly inheritance, as it is said of Israel in the

context, "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

It is to this view of the history of Israel, during the forty years between their departure from Egypt and their arrival in Canaan, that I refer, when I say, that it may be considered as a complete history in itself, and fraught, moreover, with the most interesting and salutary instruction. And so it has proved, I am persuaded, to countless multitudes of believers: for none such can peruse that history without finding in it, besides many and most striking testimonies to Christ and his mediatorial work,—the subject which must ever be of surpassing interest to his people,—much also to interest, and reprove, and encourage them in the various circumstances in which they may be placed. But though the history of these forty years may thus be viewed as complete in itself, apart from what precedes and follows it, still it is but a portion of that larger and more extended history of God's dealings wherein he gradually unfolded his scheme of redeeming mercy, from the moment it was announced in the garden of Eden, till it was consummated on Mount Calvary in the obedience unto death of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. And, viewed in this connection, the termination of the pilgrimage of Israel in the wilderness was but a temporary resting-place, a preparation for another series of enterprises, equally momentous with any which had preceded them in the eventful history of that people.

Israel, under the guidance and protection of the ark, that wonder-working symbol of the person of Christ, had passed over Jordan on dry ground, and had quietly encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. There Joshua received a command from God to circumcise those of the people who had not before been circumcised, and in that command he received, for the second time, the pledge or token of Israel's title to the land of Canaan, which had been originally given to Abraham. Subsequently to this, they did eat the passover,—another pledge of the promise that they should possess the land of Canaan. And we have seen, moreover, that on the morrow after the passover, the manna ceased, and they ate of the old corn of the land,—the plainest

and most palpable proof that their wilderness state was at an end, and that they had now reached the land of promise. But all these evidences of the divine faithfulness in the past, and all these pledges of the due fulfilment of his promises in the future, were but preparations for new enterprises, which would require new and still more vigorous exertion. They had entered the land, but they had yet to conquer it ; and it was the same land of which their fathers had said, about forty years before, "The people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great ; and, moreover, we saw children of Anak there."

Israel, indeed, were no longer a faithless and faint-hearted people as their fathers had been ; and Joshua was probably in no degree behind Moses himself in confidence and courage. But faith does not render men blind to danger or insensible to pain ; and however confident, therefore, both Joshua and Israel might be as to their ultimate triumph, the prospect of the conflict on which they were about to enter might be formidable enough to awaken their anxiety and concern. There must, indeed, have been something solemn in the very quietness in which they were encamped in Gilgal. We are told, in the immediately following context, that "Jericho was straitly shut up, because of the children of Israel : none went out, and none came in."

But how were Israel to take possession of a city that was walled and very great ? or how did they know that the inhabitants of the city might not suddenly break out upon them in their encampment ? It could hardly fail to be with them a solemn season, till they knew in what way they were to commence the work of conquest on which they had been sent, and by what means divine aid was to be afforded them. To Joshua, especially, questions must have occurred as to the course which he was to follow, calculated to perplex, if not to discourage him ; for he could hardly avoid forming some scheme of procedure, or some idea of what he was to do, towards carrying into effect the purpose of the commission with which he had been entrusted. We may safely conclude, however, that the course which he ultimately followed was one which he never would have thought of ; and that, therefore, he could have no formed plan of opera-

tion, in the success of which he could exercise faith at the moment that the event recorded in the passage before us took place, when "he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand."

With regard to the character of the person who thus appeared to Joshua, this passage itself, together with the context, affords us a great deal of information. It intimates, in a way too plain, I think, to be misunderstood, that it was a divine person; for "Joshua," we are told, "fell on his face to the earth, and did worship;" while the person to whom he thus paid divine honour not only received it, but said to Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy,"—the language, it will be remembered, in which Moses was addressed, when he approached the burning bush on Mount Horeb, and of which we are expressly told that it was God who so addressed him. And in farther confirmation of this view of the subject, if it needed any more, it is said in the second verse of the next chapter, speaking of the same person, that "the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho."

But further, the language before us plainly teaches, I think, that the divine person here spoken of was Christ: for when Joshua said to him, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" he said, "Nay; but as Captain" or Prince "of the host of the Lord am I now come,"—a title which is peculiarly applicable to Christ in his kingly office, as ruling and defending his people, and conquering all his and their enemies. And it is in obvious allusion, I think, to this very passage, that the apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where allusions to Old Testament times and transactions are especially to be expected, says concerning Christ, that "it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

The general tenor of Scripture, indeed, and the constitution of the Covenant of Grace, would lead us to conclude, that in all cases where a divine person appeared to any of the children of men, it was the second person of the Godhead who so appeared, inasmuch as it was only through him that any communication of mercy could be made to fallen man; while, by such appearances

to the Old Testament saints, he did gradually unfold to the Church the mystery of his incarnation, when, in the fulness of time, he was to appear God manifest in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. The manner of his appearing, too, was full of instruction to the Church respecting his mediatorial work, being always suited to the occasion on which he appeared, and to the condition and necessities of those to whom he revealed himself.

When he appeared to Abraham to reveal the divine purpose of destroying Sodom, it was as a wayfaring man, entering into familiar converse, and partaking of the proffered hospitality, whereby the patriarch was, no doubt, encouraged to prefer the bold petitions which he successively urged on behalf of that devoted city. When he appeared to Moses, to give him his commission to bring Israel out of Egypt, it was as a flame of fire in a bush, burning, but not consuming it,—a plain and most emphatic assurance that his Church should survive the hot persecution of Egypt, and should be brought up unhurt out of the furnace of iron. When he manifested himself to them on their journey to Canaan, it was as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to guide them through the trackless desert, and as a rock which supplied them with refreshing water in the dry and parched wilderness: for the apostle tells us that the Rock which so supplied them was Christ.

And when, at a later period, he manifested himself for the deliverance of his three servants, who, because of their fidelity and allegiance to the God of heaven, had been cast into the burning fiery furnace, it was as one of themselves that he appeared, and in the same circumstances, as if sharing their danger, while in reality robbing the devouring element of all its power to injure them: for though there must have been a divine glory in his appearance, yet it was in the likeness of human nature that he was manifested to the eye of the astonished king, when he exclaimed, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . and, lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

It was thus that from the beginning Christ was manifested to his Church, not merely as a divine person, but in such a

manner and in such circumstances as to unfold his mediatorial character, and to give his people the assurance of his presence and protection. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

These remarks, on the seasonable manner in which the second person of the Godhead manifested himself to the Old Testament Church, are especially applicable to the instance before us. Joshua, as we have seen, was about to enter on that mighty enterprize which was to terminate in the conquest of Canaan, but in the prosecution of which he might reckon on the most determined opposition on the part of its guilty and infatuated, but powerful and warlike inhabitants; and it would appear that he was yet without any special instructions as to the manner in which he was to commence the work which had been assigned to him.

It was in this state of things that He who had conducted Israel through the wilderness, and made them pass over Jordan on dry ground, appeared to Joshua as a man with his sword drawn in his hand, and in reply to the somewhat bold question, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" announced himself as the Prince or Captain of the Lord's host, and, moreover, as a divine person to whom Joshua was required to do homage. When, in answer to the inquiry, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" he said, "Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come," we are to understand it, I think, as implying a great deal more than merely that he was not for the adversaries of Israel. He thereby gave Joshua to know, that while he was not one of his enemies, neither was he to be considered merely as a friend or fellow-soldier on whose aid Israel might reckon. He assumed an infinitely higher character and office,—even that of absolute sovereign over all the host of the Lord, whether the armies of Israel, or other hosts whom the Lord may employ to execute all his pleasure; and in the exercise of this divine supremacy, he commanded Joshua himself,—commissioned though he had been to fight the battles of the Lord,—to do him homage as his Sovereign: "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy."

But neither was this a mere manifestation of the divine nature, and an exercise of the divine authority of the glorious person who thus appeared to Joshua. There was in his appearance and in what he said an assurance which could not fail to fill the heart of Joshua with confidence and gladness. It was an assurance far beyond a promise of mere aid in the great conflict on which he was about to enter. It was a plain and most emphatic intimation that this divine person was to take upon himself the conduct and the issue of that conflict. He appeared in the attitude of one who was about to engage in battle ; and by that alone he did very expressively declare that the purpose of his appearing was to secure the victory to Israel. He farther declared that he had come then as the Captain of the Lord's host ; thereby intimating that as he had formerly come to Israel in a different manner and for different purposes, according to their circumstances and their necessities, so he had now appeared in the way and for the purposes which their exigences required, even as a man of war, to defend, to fight for, and to give them the victory. And he required of Joshua not only submission as his military leader, the Captain of the Lord's host, but as a divine person, even the Lord of hosts ; thereby declaring that whatever he had promised or engaged to do must infallibly be accomplished, be the opposition of enemies what it might, and that to him alone all the glory and praise of the victory should be due.

There was thus given to Joshua, before he entered on his conflict, and before he had received any special instructions as to his procedure, an assurance which he could not misunderstand, that the victory should be his,—that the Lord himself was to fight for Israel. He did not need that any future visible manifestation of the presence of this glorious person, the Captain of the Lord's host, should be vouchsafed to him. He had, once for all, such a manifestation of that presence, and a pledge that it would never forsake him. And that the divine person, who had thus condescended to appear to him, had taken the conquest of Canaan into his own hand, and would with infallible certainty give Joshua the victory whithersoever he went, was to be immediately demonstrated in the fall of Jericho, as recorded in the next chapter, when, without the exercise of any skill on the part

of Joshua, and without any effort on the part of the people, "the wall" of the city "fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

We cannot doubt that the memorable interview which Joshua was permitted to hold with this glorious person, the Captain of the Lord's host, would be present to his mind, and would encourage and strengthen him amidst all the dangers and difficulties of his long-protracted conflict. The assurance which he then received must have placed him above the fear of defeat or of failure, except in so far as he and Israel might fail in their faith and become faint-hearted. And this was not improbable; for the promise which had been given to him, that the Captain of the Lord's host had himself undertaken the conquest of Canaan, did not exclude the instrumentality of Joshua's skill or of Israel's courage,—nor was it so absolute a promise as not to leave room for the chastisement of the people by a temporary defeat, in the event of their doubting the divine word or disobeying the divine commandment. Still, the promise was large and comprehensive enough to give Joshua the assurance that, in spite of all occasional and temporary interruptions, the work of conquest would go on until Israel were put in possession of the inheritance sworn unto their fathers.

But the promise and the pledge given to Joshua were not to terminate with the conquest of Canaan. That conquest was itself but a type of the more extended, the universal subjugation of the kingdoms of the world to the authority of Christ. The promises of giving Canaan to the children of Abraham were explicit and frequently repeated. But they were not more explicit nor more frequently repeated than the promises given to Christ as Mediator, that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed,—that as King on God's holy hill of Zion, the Son of God, and the heir of all things, there shall be given to him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,—that his dominion shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,—and that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

The conquest of Canaan, I have observed, was a type of this

more extended, this universal conquest, when the Church of Christ shall embrace all the nations of the earth ; and it will be found, on a careful study of the conflict which Israel long maintained with the idolatrous nations of Canaan, that the type does very strikingly foreshadow the history and progress of the Church since the day that the command was given, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." But besides being a type, the conquest of Canaan did itself form a part of Messiah's universal conquest ; and the promise, therefore, which he gave to Joshua was given to the Church of all subsequent times. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

He is, therefore, now what he was in the time of Joshua, the Captain of the Lord's host, who has himself undertaken the conduct and the issue of that conflict to which he has called his Church, and in which he honours his people in employing them as the instruments whereby to achieve all his victories over the kingdom of darkness. And how ample is the encouragement which the Church has to carry on with vigour the holy warfare in which she is engaged ! We are ready, perhaps, to conclude that after the assurance which Joshua received, no danger could terrify and no difficulty could discourage him, knowing that the work in which he was engaged was the Lord's own work, and that His own arm and His own right hand would get him the victory ; and we might suppose that with such an assurance we too would be strong and of a good courage. And has the Captain of the Lord's host, then, retracted the promise which he gave to the Church in the plains of Jericho ? Or has he said one word from which it may be inferred that the promise was limited to the conquest of Canaan ? Has he not, times without number, in his Word, plainly intimated and expressly declared the very contrary ? Was it not his last command to his disciples, "Go ye, . . . and teach all nations ?" Was not this command founded, for their encouragement, on the great and glorious truth, that all power is given to him in heaven and in earth ? And was not the command accompanied with the gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world ?" And as if to renew the very promise made to Joshua, is he not called by his apostle "the Captain" of his people's salva-

tion, who has declared that he sendeth none a warfare on his own charges?

If, therefore, the great conquest, the subjugation of the kingdoms of the world to the authority of Christ, has hitherto proceeded slowly, and is still very far from its consummation, it is not because of any lack in the number or the faithfulness of his promises. But, like Israel of old, the Church has often been faithless and faint-hearted,—insensible alike to the obligations under which she is laid, and the honour which her divine Head has put upon her, by the commission which he has given her to go up and possess the land, even to carry the glad tidings of the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. She will, however, be one day awakened to a lively apprehension of her duty and her privilege; and glorious will be the victories which she shall be instrumental in achieving, when Christ shall take to him his great power and reign,—when the people of all lands shall be subdued under him,—and when his name shall be known, and honoured, and confided in, from the rising to the setting sun.

Whatever there may be either of reproof or of encouragement in these views of this passage, as applicable to the Church at large,—the people of God in their collective capacity,—let believers consider it as addressed to themselves individually. Every believer is a soldier of Jesus Christ, and has his place and his part assigned to him in the great enterprise to which the Church is called,—the extension and establishment of Christ's kingdom,—and every believer, therefore, will bear his share of blame when he participates in the neglect of the Church, and will receive his portion of honour when he has acted with her a faithful part towards her divine Head. The place and part even of the humblest individual can never be forgotten or overlooked by Him who has appointed them,—and neither can the manner in which that place is occupied and that part fulfilled.

In human enterprises, how many are there who have contributed to the successful issue, without reaping any thing of the honour or advantage of such enterprises? It is so in all mere worldly conquests. How different in that spiritual warfare to which Christ has called his people! Not only is the place assigned to each individual the best for the interests of the great

cause generally, but in the selection of that place, his own individual interests have been most effectually provided for; and if it should prove to be a post of danger,—if privation and suffering should be the consequence of his fidelity to his divine leader,—the Captain of his salvation,—the larger will be his share in the glory and honour of that triumph to which he has been instrumental in contributing. He need not fear that his humble place and his feeble efforts will be overlooked or set at nought, because of the magnitude of the work, in which his labours may appear so insignificant, or because of the glorious results, amidst which his personal concerns may seem to be a matter of little moment. Let him be assured, that even a cup of cold water to a fainting fellow-soldier will not go without its reward. As there is not a duty imposed upon the Church collectively in which he is not required to take a part according to his means and opportunities, so there is not a promise given to the Church, for her encouragement and consolation, which he is not warranted to lay hold of and appropriate to himself, if his desire and his purpose in doing so be to advance the glory of his divine Head within the sphere of his own influence.

To the believer, this will be a very solemn thought when he reflects on his responsibility, — but a very animating and encouraging thought when he looks to the good fight which is to be fought, and to the crown of righteousness which is laid up for the faithful soldier. Whatever may be the peculiarities of his condition, the severity of his trials, the difficult nature of his duties, or the strength of his temptations, he will see, in the various manifestations which Christ made of himself to his people in former times, an assurance that He who is the Leader and Commander of his people will be present with him.

We have seen that the manner in which Christ revealed himself to the Old Testament Church was specially adapted to the circumstances in which they were placed, and to the difficulties under which they stood in need of his aid at the time. So it was in his dealings with the disciples during his manifestation in the flesh,—and so will it be in his dispensations towards his people unto the end. Are they in perplexity and trouble, overwhelmed with doubts and fears, and ready to sink under the suggestions of their own unbelieving hearts?—he will be to them

as he was to Peter on the waters, when he stretched out his hand and saved the faithless disciple, though he may reprove them as he reproved Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Are they in affliction, suffering under painful bereavement, and ready to give way to hard thoughts of God's dealings with them?—he will be to them what he was to the beloved family at Bethany, not indeed to recall their dead from the grave, but to convey to them such assurances of his divine compassion and sympathy as will reconcile them to the divine dispensations, and convince them that he afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men. And if they become discouraged and faint-hearted in maintaining their conflict with their spiritual adversaries, he will make himself known to them as the Captain of the Lord's host, who has undertaken on their behalf,—whose grace will be made sufficient for them, and whose strength will be perfected in their weakness,—and who will at last make them more than conquerors through himself who loved them.

LXVII.

JERICO TAKEN.

JOSHUA VI. 20.

WE are informed, at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, that while "Joshua was by Jericho,"—where Israel had encamped after the passage of Jordan,—there appeared to him "a man" standing "over against him with his sword drawn in his hand," who announced himself the Captain of the host of the Lord, and commanded Joshua to loose his shoe from off his foot, for the place whereon he stood was holy. This glorious person, as I formerly endeavoured to show, was none other than the Angel who had redeemed Jacob from all evil,—who appeared to Moses in the burning bush on Horeb,—who went before Israel, to keep them in the way,—and of whom God said, "My name is in him;"—even "the Angel," or Messenger, "of the covenant,"—the Eternal Word,—He who from the beginning rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and whose delights were with the sons of men. And his appearing to Joshua was a plain intimation that he had come to take upon himself the conduct and the issue of the great conflict in which Israel were about to engage with the inhabitants of Canaan; nor can we doubt that Joshua would so interpret the appearance and the language of that glorious person. But if there had been any uncertainty in his mind on the subject, it would be very quickly removed; for we are immediately told that "the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho,

and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." He then proceeded to give Joshua instructions as to the manner in which the city was to be taken. "And ye shall compass the city," said he, "all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him." With these instructions Joshua proceeded forthwith to comply; and the result is recorded in the passage before us, in the very words in which it had been foretold; for "it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

Such was the manner in which the people of Israel gained the first, and, in some respects, the most important victory in their conflict with the inhabitants of Canaan; and while, in common with all the other events in the history of God's dealings with his people, it bears witness to his power and faithfulness, it affords a peculiar manifestation of his grace and wisdom. One of the great truths which was most carefully inculcated on Israel was, that their redemption was altogether of grace, and in no degree to be ascribed to the wisdom of their own counsel or the strength of their own arm. And this was accompanied with the assurance, that if they but believed his word, and confided in his faithfulness, he would never leave nor forsake them, —an assurance which had been amply verified in the experience of forty years.

But the circumstances in which they were now placed were calculated powerfully to inculcate the same truth, by giving them a new experimental proof of their dependence; and, therefore, a new manifestation of the divine faithfulness became in the same degree necessary and seasonable. Triumphant as they had hitherto been over all the difficulties that had

stood in their way, and eminently fitted as was their passage over Jordan to strengthen their confidence in the promise, that God would assuredly drive out the inhabitants of Canaan before them, still, they could not but feel that they were placed in new and trying circumstances, when they found themselves in the land of their enemies, and saw the way of retreat cut off, by the waters of Jordan returning unto their place, and flowing over all his banks, as they did before. They were well aware that they were regarded by the inhabitants of Canaan with feelings of the bitterest hostility, and that every step of their progress towards the possession of the land would be disputed with the most determined resistance. And finding themselves, therefore, embarked in the enterprise, without the power of retreating, it must have been to them a very solemn season,—a season in which fears and misgivings were most likely to be awakened. It is obvious that the most momentous consequences were suspended on the result of their first encounter with the inhabitants of Canaan, both as it regarded the Canaanites, and as it concerned the Israelites themselves; for had there been any thing doubtful as to the issue of the contest, or even if Israel had been victorious, but that their victory had been such as that it could have been accounted for from the superior skill and courage of their leader and their armies, or from a combination of circumstances that were favourable to them, the Canaanites would have been encouraged to persevere in their opposition, from the idea that they had only to contend with the unaided strength of men like themselves, while Israel, in such circumstances, might not have very clearly seen that it was God who had given them the victory.

It was a season, then, which in a peculiar manner needed a very unequivocal manifestation of divine power on behalf of Israel; and that manifestation was granted in such a way as might have demonstrated to the Canaanites the folly of the conflict which they maintained, while it bore a new and most affecting testimony to the faithfulness of God's promises to Israel. With regard, indeed, to the inhabitants of Canaan, if the measure of their iniquity had not been filled up,—if they had not, in righteous judgment, been smitten with blindness and infatuation,—the destruction of Jericho must have convinced

them that in opposing Israel they were contending with almighty strength, and that the false gods in whom they had hitherto trusted were but refuges of lies. And with regard to the Israelites, the manner in which Jericho was put into their possession was full alike of instruction and of encouragement. Being altogether a work of divine power, in which their own skill, and courage, and resources had nothing to do, it was a new and a most decisive testimony to the faithfulness of God,—a pledge of the success of every future enterprise which they might be called to undertake; while, in being commanded to carry with them, in compassing Jericho, the ark of the covenant of the Lord, before which the waters of Jordan had been divided, it was very significantly intimated to them that there their strength lay, and that so long as they were steadfast in God's covenant, the presence of the ark was a pledge that almighty power was engaged on their behalf. And thus, at the very outset of Israel's warfare in Canaan, a foundation was laid for the plea which the Church in after times was accustomed to urge in seasons of difficulty or disaster: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.... But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. . . . Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake."

There was thus, in the taking of Jericho, a very glorious display of the power and faithfulness of God,—such as could not fail to recall to the people of Israel the prophetic song which Moses was wont to sing in the wilderness, when the ark, at the appointed signal, set forward on the way towards Canaan:—"Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

But though it was altogether the doing of the Lord, there was still enough in it to put the faith both of Joshua and of the people of Israel to a severe trial. And so the apostle says, for

he places the faith manifested in the taking of Jericho on the list of the illustrious examples which he has recorded in the 11th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."

With regard to Joshua, it is abundantly evident that he must have passed through a season of trial, even previously to his receiving instructions as to his method of proceeding against Jericho,—such a trial as was sufficient to demonstrate his unshaken confidence in God. He was commanded, we are told, to carry Israel over Jordan right against Jericho; and the possession of that city, as the first stronghold in Canaan which Israel approached, was necessary to their advancing farther, with any safety, towards the subjugation of the land. But various circumstances in the narrative plainly show that the city was very strong,—so strong in the estimation of the inhabitants, that when they dared not to encounter Israel in the field, they thought themselves safe when shut up within their walls,—none being permitted to go out or to come in. And how, then, was Joshua to get possession of it? Circumstanced as Israel were, this must have been a very solemn, if not a perplexing question: for though they had already met and conquered powerful enemies in battle, yet there is nothing in their history to indicate that they were at all prepared, in so far as outward means were concerned, for such an enterprise as that of attacking and taking possession of a walled city like Jericho. Joshua, it is true, must have been greatly encouraged, both by the miraculous passage of Jordan, and by the previous report of the spies who had returned, and had said to him, "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

Still, with all these encouragements, Joshua was placed in very trying circumstances. In the eyes of the people of Israel, he stood pledged to conduct them to the conquest of Canaan. Except that they had passed Jordan, and had entered the land, this pledge remained wholly to be redeemed. And the very first act of hostility by which he was to commence that conquest was apparently one of great difficulty, and likely to lead to great delay. After all that he had experienced, then, of the temper and

character of the people,—of their impatience under protracted trials,—and of their proneness to be discouraged and to become distrustful on the appearance of difficulty or danger, he had reason to look with anxiety to the issue of his attempt against Jericho. Nay, if he had known of no other resources than human skill and courage, it must have appeared to him a very doubtful, if not a desperate undertaking. Nothing but a very strong faith in the general promise of God could have sustained him, so long as he had no special instructions respecting the way in which Jericho was actually to be taken. But even when he did receive a communication from God on the subject, not only prescribing to him the way in which he was to proceed against the place, but assuring him also of the victory,—and a victory, too, that was to be won by the immediate operation of divine power,—it was a communication fitted, and no doubt designed, to put the faith of the people of Israel to the test; and as the promised result necessarily involved the exercise of faith on their part, it might have given rise to another doubt in the mind of Joshua, whether the people would believe and obey his instructions.

These instructions, as we have seen, were of a very extraordinary kind. The people, even all the men of war, were to go round about the city once every day for six days, and on the seventh day seven times,—the priests accompanying the ark, and blowing with trumpets; and, on a certain signal to be given, the people were to shout with a loud voice, and the wall of the city was to fall down flat. Such a command, it is obvious, left the Israelites no ground of confidence but the simple word of God,—because it left no room for the exercise of any skill or courage of theirs. There was no necessary or natural connection between their compassing the city, as they were required to do, and the overthrow of its walls and bulwarks. And had they acted, therefore, on any other principle than that of implicitly relying on the divine promise, and unreservedly surrendering themselves to the divine disposal, they never would have engaged in such an enterprise. So far, indeed, from advancing their object by such a procession as they were commanded to make, we might conceive that it would only render them contemptible in the eyes of the men of Jericho,—especially when it

was repeated, day after day, without any effect, and apparently without any definite purpose. And this consideration itself was a very decisive proof of Israel's confidence in God. Their compliance with the instructions of Joshua was not the act of men betaking themselves to a desperate resource, in a moment of great fear and agitation. They received these instructions while quietly encamped in the plains of Jericho,—they deliberately set themselves to prepare for complying with them, in circumstances which afforded them leisure enough to reflect on all the objections which unbelief might suggest,—they rose early in the morning, at the command of Joshua, and having compassed or gone round the city, returned again and lodged in the camp,—this they continued to do seven days in succession, neither wearied out with the delay, nor affected by the opinion which the men of Jericho might entertain of them;—and when the critical moment arrived that was to determine whether they were to get possession of this, the first stronghold of Canaan, or whether they were to be the discomfited objects of ridicule and contempt to their enemies, as unbelieving fears might have suggested, their conduct showed that they had no doubts or misgivings on the subject;—they waited patiently for the appointed signal;—and, with the assured confidence that it would be as the Lord had said, “they shouted with a great shout,” and “the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.” Circumstanced as the Israelites then were,—having just entered a country where they might reckon on finding in every man an implacable foe, and convinced that their ultimate success, nay, their very safety, was, to all appearance, suspended on their compassing Jericho,—it was assuredly a signal exercise of faith on their part to venture their all on such an expedient, and a signal triumph of faith that the walls of the city fell down. It is true, no faith of theirs could have had an efficiency in producing such a result, any more than their shouting with a loud voice. But the act of divine power which levelled the city was inseparably connected with faith in that power on their part;—the promised result necessarily implied the strict observance of all that had been prescribed to them, so that if, through unbelief, these had been neglected, assuredly the city had not been taken;

—and it was “by faith,” therefore, that “the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”

The remarkable transaction which we are now considering is in itself, and in its bearing on the future history of Israel, very interesting and instructive. But it derives additional and very peculiar interest from the communication which was vouchsafed to Joshua, as recorded in the preceding chapter, when the Captain of the Lord's host held converse with him in the plains of Jericho. The appearance of that glorious person gave an interest and importance to the entrance of Israel on the possession of Canaan, far beyond any immediate consequences that resulted either to them or to the heathen around them. It marked that event as one that deeply concerned the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. It identified the cause of Israel with Christ's own cause, as the Prince of the kings of the earth, who is to receive the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. And it furnished a pledge, that as the ark of the covenant of the Lord compassed the city of Jericho till the walls thereof fell down, so not only should Canaan, but the world itself, be one day brought into subjection to the Captain of the Lord's host. It cannot be doubted, I think, that the appearance of Christ to Joshua was intended thus to intimate to the Church in all ages, that her conquests are begun, and carried on, and perfected under the immediate presence and authority of Him who is her Head and King ; and, consequently, to convey the assurance, that numerous, and powerful, and inveterate as her enemies may be, yet her cause, which is the cause of Christ himself, shall ultimately be triumphant. But while all this may be inferred from Christ's appearing to Joshua, the promise thus given is confirmed, and the manner in which it is to be fulfilled is very clearly explained, in the instructions which were delivered, and in the result which followed the execution of these instructions.

The attentive reader can hardly have failed to observe how intelligibly and how strikingly the first conquest of Israel in Canaan,—the taking of Jericho,—typified or shadowed forth the spiritual conquests of Messiah by the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. That Gospel has been, or will yet be made to compass all the nations of the earth, as the ark of the covenant

of the Lord compassed the walls of Jericho. How long it may be before this is accomplished, we know not. But the time is as certainly determined as were the seven days for the compassing of Jericho; and should any one be disposed to ask, why that time has been placed at such a distance, we should say in reply,—For the same reason that seven days were employed for a work which, to divine power, it had been equally easy to accomplish in one,—even because so it seemed good in his sight. But the time is fixed; and when the Gospel has accomplished its course,—when it has been preached to every creature under heaven, and the divine purposes have been fulfilled,—its triumph will be as complete as that by which it is typified in the passage before us, in the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness,—the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan. To the ungodly and unbelieving, the idea of subjugating the world, and effecting a great moral revolution in the whole family of the human race, by the preaching of the cross of Christ, may appear as extravagant as the conduct of Israel might have appeared to the men of Jericho. And we know, in fact, that it does so; for Christ crucified was from the beginning to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

But the preaching of the cross is, nevertheless, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. It is the appointed ordinance of him who was from the beginning the Captain of the Lord's host, and is still the Captain of his people's salvation. He has already manifested his sovereignty by giving power and efficacy to his own ordinance, in the subjugation of multitudes to his holy and spiritual government. And on the strength of his own assurance, as the faithful and true Witness, his people are taught to look forward to a still more glorious triumph. Nor have there been wanting, from time to time, some more striking manifestations of his power accompanying the proclamation of his truth, whereby to strengthen the faith and encourage the hope of his people, regarding the great triumph typified in the passage we are considering. It has been said of the great Reformation, in the accomplishment of which Luther, himself a Popish monk, was the chief instrument, "The Church of Rome is seen under Pope Leo X. in all its strength and glory:—a monk speaks, and in the half of Europe this power and glory crumble into dust." And

what did the then obscure monk speak? He gave forth the one simple but most precious truth, the free remission of sin through the blood of the cross,—justification by faith in Christ alone; or, as it is expressed in that text which had been borne in with a divine power on his own soul, “The just shall live by faith.”

The remark which I have quoted was probably made without any reference, by the author of it, to the transaction which we have been considering. But we can hardly fail, with this passage before us, to see in that remark a striking illustration of the typical prediction which it contains of the future triumphs of the Gospel. It is thus that, besides the precious promises recorded in the Scriptures, sometimes in express terms, and sometimes, but not less intelligibly and emphatically, as in the passage before us, by type and figure, Christ has been pleased to give occasional manifestations of his divine power in a peculiar manner, for strengthening the faith of his people in these promises,—showing them that by apparently still weaker means than in the case of Jericho, he can achieve victories infinitely more momentous in their results. And when his time is come,—when the perfect period of seven days has run its course,—perfect, because appointed by his unerring wisdom,—then his divine power will go forth in the word of the everlasting Gospel, overthrowing the walls of the mystical Babylon, and laying desolate all the strongholds of the wicked one; and “great voices” shall be heard in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Such, then, being the provision which Christ has made for keeping alive the faith and hope of his people regarding the universal spread of the Gospel, it were as faithless on their part to doubt or despond concerning this glorious result, as it would have been in his ancient people to question the faithfulness of the promise, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho;”—and it were as disobedient in the Church now to relinquish the means which she possesses for helping on that result, as it would have been in Israel to have left off compassing Jericho while its walls were yet standing. These means may, to all appearance, be utterly inadequate to the accomplishment of the object at

which the Church aims,—even the establishment of Christ's spiritual authority over all the nations of the world. But they cannot be more so than those which Joshua was commanded to employ at the commencement of his conquests in Canaan; and every such difficulty is met and resolved by the simple statement, that the effect is to be measured, not by the means and the instruments employed, but by the almighty power and unchangeable faithfulness of Him who has appointed them. And have not believers enough, in their own experience, to forbid their despairing of the triumph of the Gospel in any case, or to any extent? For when they think of their own natural alienation from God,—their guilt and helplessness so long as they were dead in trespasses and in sins,—their aversion to every thing spiritual and holy,—and the obstinacy, it may be, with which they did long resist all the rising calls and convictions of conscience, and all the remonstrances of the Word of God;—when they think of all this, to what can they ascribe their conversion to God, the subjugation of their rebellious hearts to his will, and their being quickened from spiritual death to spiritual life, but to that almighty agency which will prove as irresistible, wherever it begins to operate, as it did in their own case?

And what was the instrument which this divine power employed to subdue them, but that before which all spiritual wickednesses in high places are one day to fall, even the doctrine of Christ crucified, making it to them the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation? I do not, of course, mean by these remarks to say that true believers can ever really doubt what is so explicitly and so frequently asserted in Scripture,—that the Gospel shall be “preached to every creature under heaven,”—that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,”—that Christ shall take to him his great power and reign, subduing the people under him,—and that “his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” But even with believers, all this may be rather a promise which they do not disbelieve or doubt, than the subject of a lively faith and an animating and comforting hope. It may be like a dormant principle in their heart, called occasionally into activity, when they are directly solicited to minister to the support of some

missionary undertaking, but which does not exercise any thing like an habitual influence on them in the way either of elevating their affections, or of animating and refreshing their spirits. They believe that the Gospel will ultimately put down error and delusion, and that the kingdom of light will be established on the ruins of the kingdom of darkness. But they may be secretly giving way to the chilling influence of the thought,—a thought which, practically, is nearly allied to unbelief,—that this glorious and blessed state of things is at a great distance,—that they will never see it,—and that they cannot be expected to take the same lively interest in the prospect of it as those will be required and even compelled to feel who shall see its near approach, or may even witness its arrival. But did they seriously reflect on the subject, they could hardly fail to perceive, that by thus permitting their belief in the coming glory of the latter day to lie inactive in their minds as a mere opinion, exercising at best but a feeble influence on their heart, they are shutting up from themselves a source of very pure and very elevated enjoyment; for what ought more deeply to interest believers, or what is fitted to furnish a subject of more pleasing and delightful contemplation, than the sure prospect of a world now exhibiting, as its general character, every thing that ought to be revolting to a renewed soul, converted into one great family, knit together by all those holy affections and righteous principles which characterise the children of God?

But besides all this, and what is still more important, to rest contented with such a cold and uninfluential belief in the progress and universal prevalence of Gospel truth, is to withhold that homage which is due, and which, when rendered, must be especially acceptable to Christ. To cherish a lively faith, and a joyful hope, and a longing expectation respecting the manifestation of Christ's mediatorial sovereignty, in casting down the strongholds of sin and Satan, and establishing his own reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost in the hearts and consciences of men, must be a spiritual offering which he will receive with complacency and approbation. To contribute of our substance to the advancement of his cause when, opportunity offers, and occasion requires it, is, no doubt, to honour Christ. But far more is he honoured by the believing,

joyful, and eager expectation of the due fulfilment of all the glorious things which he has spoken of Zion. And this is an homage which is not dependent on worldly circumstances, and which all his people, therefore, may equally render to him. They may not, perhaps, occupy a prominent place in his Church,—they may not be appointed to carry the ark of the testimony,—they may not be called directly to the work of proclaiming to their fellow-men the glad tidings of salvation. But they may cherish as strong a faith, and as earnest a desire, and as lively a hope, regarding the issue of the conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, as those who are appointed to more prominent places. And this faith, and desire, and hope, will prompt them to the use of an instrument for advancing Christ's cause, which also is equally within the reach of every believer,—even fervent, frequent, persevering prayer. And were there felt among Christians generally a deeper interest in the prosperity of Christ's cause,—did they feel it more to be their own personal concern, and the chief, too, of all their concerns,—and did they employ appointed means, in the exercise of a stronger faith in the promise of Christ, might we not expect to see that cause more rapidly advance? Let none of his people, then, be weary in his work, nor doubt the ultimate fall of the strongholds of Satan, how frequently soever they may have been compassed, apparently without effect; for it is a sure, a sealed promise that "his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

LXVIII.

GERIZIM AND EBAL.

JOSHUA VIII. 30-35.

THE passage before us is, in various respects, a very remarkable one. The transaction which it narrates, even to its most minute details, had been twice expressly enjoined by Moses in his farewell address to Israel, as recorded in the 11th and 27th chapters of Deuteronomy. We there find him not only commanding generally, that when Israel had come into the land of Canaan, they should build an altar of whole stones, on which no man had lifted up a tool, and should offer thereon burnt-offerings unto the Lord their God, and that the blessings and cursings of the law should be publicly pronounced in the hearing of all the people,—but marking by name the precise spot where this great solemnity was to be observed. Moses had never been in Canaan; yet we find him describing the place spoken of in the passage we are considering, as if both he and Israel had been familiar with it. “Behold,” said he, in the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy, “I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon Mount Gerizim,

and the curse upon Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?" And then, in the 27th chapter, he resumes the subject, giving minute instructions as to the kind of altar which they were to build, and the place where it was to be erected,—the preparation of stones on which the law was to be written,—and the division of the tribes of Israel into two, one-half to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless, and the other half on Mount Ebal to curse;—all which was carefully observed by Joshua, as related in the passage before us.

And how profound must have been the impression which was made upon the people of Israel by the solemn transaction here described,—and how powerfully must that transaction have operated in strengthening their confidence in all the promises of God respecting their conquest of Canaan, and their final establishment there! While engaged in that transaction, they could not fail to recollect,—indeed they were reminded by the reading of the law,—that they were doing what Moses had most carefully and minutely enjoined them to do; and they could as little fail to perceive, that the injunction which had been laid upon them did virtually predict all the wonderful things which had befallen them, from their passing Jordan till their arrival in the valley between Ebal and Gerizim. Moses, indeed, did not, in so many words, foretell the cutting off of the waters of Jordan, the overthrow of the walls of Jericho, and the destruction of the city of Ai, even after it had threatened to be an insurmountable barrier to the further progress of Israel into the land of Canaan. But in commanding them to do as the passage we are considering tells us they did at Gerizim and Ebal, he did most emphatically foretell that they would arrive at that place; and, therefore, he did virtually foretell their triumph over all the obstacles that might oppose their progress thitherward. In giving them that command, he furnished them with a pledge that God would be with them, similar to that which he himself received when he was commissioned to go down into Egypt to bring up Israel thence. On receiving that commission, he shrunk from it with dismay, and said, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" And God

said, "Certainly I will be with thee ; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee : When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain."

Their serving God on Mount Horeb could not, of course, be a sensible token or proof of God's presence with Moses in Egypt, or of the divine authority of the commission which he had received ; for it was not to take place till after Israel had been actually delivered. But it was such a token or pledge as it was befitting God to give, and to require Moses to confide in ; for it was a most emphatic repetition of the promise, "Certainly I will be with thee,"—a declaration that the promise would be as infallibly fulfilled as if, by an act of almighty power, Israel should be carried from Egypt to Horeb without molestation or hindrance. And when Moses, in the faith of that promise, persevered in his undertaking, and at last found himself at Mount Horeb, surrounded with the thousands and ten thousands of Israel, admitted to closer communion with God than sinful man had ever before enjoyed, and instructed there to erect a tabernacle wherein the visible symbol of the divine presence should dwell ; with what admiration and gratitude must he have remembered the words of God, "This shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee : When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain !" And how largely must it have contributed to his consolation and encouragement during the succeeding eight-and-thirty years of weary wandering in the wilderness, and of bitter suffering from the unbelief and murmuring of a rebellious people ! And, in like manner, when Israel engaged in the solemn service described in the passage before us, and recollected that Moses had enjoined it, and had, moreover, determined the place where it was to be observed, as minutely as if he had actually seen Gerizim and Ebal, how profound must have been their admiration of the foreknowledge and the power of God ; and how strong at that moment their confidence in his faithfulness,—their assurance that not one good thing which his mouth had spoken concerning Israel should fail of being accomplished !

Such has been from the beginning God's gracious method of dealing with his people in the way of strengthening and confirming their faith. To those who believed his promise, he not

only fulfilled it, but gave, besides, such additional proofs of his faithfulness as were calculated greatly to strengthen their confidence in every new promise which he made to them, and thereby to prepare them for bearing patiently, and without fainting, the accumulating trials which he might see meet to appoint them. When Moses arrived at Horeb with the people of Israel, having succeeded in delivering them from the bondage of Egypt, he had experienced, and that, too, in a very marvellous manner, the faithfulness of the divine promise, "Certainly I will be with thee." But when he thought of all that he was commanded to do there, during their long encampment by the mount, while he reared the tabernacle, and prescribed the ritual that was to guide the worship of Israel in all future times, how must his confidence in all the other promises of God have gathered strength from recollecting that it had been said to him, "And this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain!" And, in like manner, when Israel arrived at the place spoken of in the passage under consideration, they had experienced, at every step of their progress, the faithfulness of God's promise, that he would be with Joshua as he had been with Moses. But what an additional testimony to that faithfulness was given them when they found themselves engaged in the great solemnity which Moses had by divine authority commanded them to observe, and on the spot which, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he had described!

And believers have the assurance that so God deals with his people still,—that they who believe his word and confide in his faithfulness will have unfolded to them new and more enlarged views of his character, whereby their faith will be strengthened, and their confidence in his promises confirmed; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." And so our Lord declared to Nathanael, when he said to him, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Nathanael believed on the first testimony which was given him that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of

Israel ; and the confession of his faith was immediately met by the gracious assurance, that still brighter displays of the character and work of Christ awaited him, whereby his faith would be strengthened, and his joy and peace in believing enlarged.

And that God's dealings with Israel, in vouchsafing to them abundant proofs of his faithfulness, whereby to strengthen their confidence in his promises, was not peculiar to them, but was intended to exemplify or illustrate the gracious principle on which God always deals with his people, is evident from the care which was taken, that not only the Israelites of that time, but their believing children of all future generations, should profit by the testimonies which God had borne to his presence in the midst of them, and to the exercise of his power on their behalf. Not only were Moses and Joshua instructed to commit to writing the great leading events which had befallen them, and to make provision for this record being read, from time to time, in the hearing of the people ; but permanent memorials were erected in commemoration of the more striking of these events, which, viewed in connection with the institutions of Moses and the written history of Israel, afforded, even to posterity, an almost visible manifestation of God's mighty works on behalf of their fathers. Thus, when Israel passed over Jordan, Joshua, by the divine command, took twelve stones out of Jordan, and pitched them in Gilgal, and spake unto the children of Israel, saying, " When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones ? then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord ; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off : and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever." When the walls of Jericho fell down, also, at the presence of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that city was doomed to lie in ruins, as a permanent testimony to the divine power which fought for Israel,—a testimony which was rendered more striking, or rather was revived with more than its original force, even at the distance of five hundred years,—both for strengthening the faith of believers, and for convicting and leaving without excuse the impenitent and unbelieving,—when the curse which Joshua had pronounced on the man who should rebuild Jericho

actually came upon Hiel the Bethelite, who "laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub."

When Israel, on taking Jericho, committed a trespass in the accursed thing, and Achan, the guilty individual, had been put to death, a great heap of stones was raised over him,—a significant memorial to future times of the severity with which God visited the transgression of his people, even amidst the brightest manifestations of his power on their behalf. And when they arrived at the plain between Ebal and Gerizim, one part of the great solemnity which they were there to observe was, to "set up great stones, and plaster them with plaster," and to "write upon the stones all the words of the law very plainly." By these, and many other memorials of a similar kind, care was taken to furnish such proofs of the reality of God's gracious interpositions on behalf of Israel, as could not fail greatly to strengthen the faith and encourage the hearts of God's people in future times; while they bore most emphatic testimony against Israel as often as they revolted, and served to vindicate the severest of the divine judgments whereby God took vengeance on their inventions.

While God was thus graciously providing for keeping alive in the minds of Israel, and transmitting to their posterity, the remembrance of his mighty works, he saw meet to require of them a renewal of their solemn covenant engagements to him; and this formed the chief part of the memorable transaction on Mount Ebal. They had already entered and begun the conquest of Canaan; and before they proceeded further, it was befitting that they should publicly, and solemnly, and in their collective capacity as a people, give their consent to the terms on which they were to possess the land, and acknowledge the obligations under which they thereby came to serve the Lord only. Accordingly, in obedience to the command formerly given by Moses, Joshua placed six of the tribes of Israel on Mount Gerizim, and the other six on Mount Ebal,—the priests, with the ark of the covenant, occupying the space between them. Of the six tribes on Mount Gerizim, it is said that they were appointed to bless, and of the six on Mount Ebal that they were to curse.

This, in fact, was just a renewal, in a very solemn manner, of

what Moses had done before. In the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy, we find him saying, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known." Then he adds, "And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal." The purpose of this obviously was, that the whole congregation of Israel might solemnly renew their covenant engagement, acknowledging and acquiescing in the terms on which they were to continue in the peaceable possession of Canaan, and calling Gerizim and Ebal to witness, that they should justly forfeit the blessing from the one, and righteously incur the curse from the other, if they should turn aside from the commandments of the Lord their God, and go after other gods to serve them. And accordingly, we find Moses, in the 27th chapter of Deuteronomy, directing that the Levites should speak, "and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen." And so he commands in regard to various other sins, on which a curse was pronounced, and to which the people in like manner were required to say, Amen. And then he concludes with this general and most comprehensive statement, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

That all this was observed by Joshua on the occasion referred to in the passage before us, we cannot doubt; and the whole congregation of Israel, therefore, not only set their seal to it as a truth, but solemnly acknowledged the rectitude of the sentence, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." There might be some among the people of Israel who entertained but low and inadequate views of the spirituality and extent of the law, and, therefore, might be little aware of what was implied in the sentence,

the rectitude of which they professed to acknowledge. And such persons would, in all probability, feel the fewest misgivings, and manifest the least backwardness in saying, Amen, to that sentence.

But to those,—of whom, there is reason to believe, there were at that time a vast multitude,—who had right apprehensions of the purity, and holiness, and rectitude of the law, as requiring the perfect obedience of the heart and life, and that on pain of condemnation, the transaction here recorded must have been a very solemn one. Their views of the extent of the curse would correspond with their views of the extent of the law; and when they examined their heart and reviewed their life, they must have felt as if, in saying Amen, they were imprecating upon themselves the curse which had been pronounced. They were conscious that they were guilty, and must have been convinced, that if dealt with according to the rigour of the law, they had forfeited the blessing and had come under the curse. They might have been ready, therefore, to shrink from hearing the law, as their fathers formerly did when it was delivered to them from Mount Sinai. But a gracious provision was made for quieting the fears and encouraging the hearts of all such truly humble, penitent, and believing worshippers. There was exhibited to them on Mount Ebal, whereon the curse had been put, a type of Him who was afterwards revealed as the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believeth; for it was a prominent thing in the command of Moses, and was the first thing in the execution of that command by Joshua, that he “built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt-offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace-offerings.” The sacrifice offered on an altar of unhewn stone, on which no human skill had been expended, did most significantly set forth Him who offered a sacrifice to which no human merit could add any value: and though we cannot tell to what extent the believing Israelites understood the type, or saw prefigured therein the great Antitype, yet we cannot doubt that the burnt-offering presented on Mount Ebal was that in which they found a refuge from the curse which had been put on the same mount;

and that it was on the strength of the sacrifice there typified, that they were enabled to say Amen to the solemn declaration, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

The truth then announced, and to which Israel set their seal, is a truth still, being the sentence of a law which is unchangeably holy, righteous, and good; and whether men will say Amen to it or not, it is a truth which God will assert and vindicate to the conviction of all his intelligent creatures, even those who may now dispute it. And there are many such. It is, in fact, denied or disputed by all who are looking for pardon and exemption from punishment to something else than the one great Sacrifice, whereby the demands of divine justice have been satisfied, and the divine law itself magnified and made honourable. I say, by all who look for pardon and exemption from punishment; for this is the amount of what unregenerate men either look or wish for. Did they really desire heaven,—a place of holy blessedness, derived from communion with a holy God and intercourse with holy creatures,—they would soon discover that even if the law could relax somewhat of its rigour, and should not enforce the curse which it has itself denounced, they would be as far as ever from having any claim or title to eternal life,—to an unfading heavenly inheritance; and as far as ever from being in a state in which they could enjoy it, even if they were admitted within its precincts.

But unregenerate men have no real desire for any such inheritance. Their one great concern, when they think of eternal things at all, is simply how they may escape punishment,—how they may be satisfied that the curse pronounced on "every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" will not be rigorously inflicted. And if, therefore, Christ's sacrifice does occupy any place at all among the grounds of their hope, it is merely as softening the law, or making it indulgent to what they may reckon as minor and almost unavoidable offences. With such lax views of the rectitude of the law and the truth of its denunciations, they may profess to believe even the solemn truth to which Israel were required to say, Amen; for, as they understand it, that truth is so qualified as to make an exception in favour of every sin which in their

case is, for some peculiar reason, allowable, or, at least, only an infirmity.

But every true believer has said Amen to the solemn truth propounded to Israel,—and has said it, too, without any mitigation or qualifying interpretation whatever of its plain meaning. It may have cost him a painful struggle to do so, and he may have felt, at the moment when the conviction became too powerful to be either resisted or evaded, as if he were about to surrender himself to utter and hopeless misery. And to absolute despair he must have been given up, if, along with the awful truth, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” he had not, at the same time, seen and been convinced of the precious truth, that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” But, in like manner as to Israel of old, the curse was presented to him in connection with the burnt-offering whereon that curse was exhausted ; and while he was required, and felt himself constrained to acknowledge the rectitude of the sentence which had been pronounced upon him, in common with every other sinner, he was assured, on the same infallible authority, that Christ hath redeemed his people from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. And thus, while he might have appeared to the self-righteous, who will not admit their guilt and helplessness to the extent of what the law of God represents, and might, perhaps, appear to himself, to be on the very verge of despair, he was in reality about to stand on sure and solid ground for justification in the sight of God ; because he was about to transfer his hope from the miserable delusion that he had some righteousness of his own, and that the law of God would not deal rigorously with him for any deficiency or shortcoming that might be found in his obedience, to the perfect righteousness of Christ, wherein he might stand accepted with God, without any compromise of the justice and rigour of the divine law.

Have we, then, acquiesced unreservedly in the rectitude of the judgment which the divine law has passed on every sinner of mankind ? If we have not,—if we are still struggling to resist the conviction, or still labouring to persuade ourselves that it cannot be understood in the absolute and unqualified sense in

which it is expressed, which is just to say that it were a harsh and unrighteous sentence if it were so to be understood,—and are still seeking to draw some comfort from the thought that in mercy its rigour will be relaxed,—then we cannot have closed with the Gospel offer of Christ's righteousness; for that must be an unconditional and unreserved act of acceptance, to the exclusion of every other ground of hope. But if we have been brought to say Amen to the solemn declaration, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," then we are required, as Israel were, to give ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten,—to acquiesce unreservedly in the terms on which he proposes to put us in possession of our heavenly inheritance,—and to place ourselves unconditionally at his disposal, that by the discipline of his providence and the means of his grace he may prepare us, in his own time and way, for the full enjoyment of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

LXIX.

“SUN, STAND THOU STILL.”

JOSHUA X. 12-14.

THE occasion of the conflict between Israel and the Amorites, which was rendered so memorable by the miracle here described, arose out of an event recorded in the preceding chapter. We are there told that the inhabitants of Gibeon, Hivites, instead of uniting with the other nations, who were gathered together to fight with Joshua and with Israel, resolved on seeking to make peace with Joshua, as the only way in which they believed that they could save their lives. But fearing that if they were known to be of the nations of Canaan, Joshua might refuse to grant them terms of peace, “they did work wilily,” we are told, “and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country; now therefore make ye a league with us.” To this proposal the men of Israel objected, on the ground that, peradventure, they did not come from a far country, but might be of the inhabitants of Canaan, with whom Israel could make no league. The Gibeonites replied by reasserting their former declaration, appealing to the state of their apparel and their provision in proof of the great length of their journey, and

adding, that they had been induced to undertake that journey, because of the name of the Lord God of Israel, having "heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan ;" but skilfully avoiding to make any mention of Jericho and Ai, obviously because any allusion to such recent events might have awakened the suspicion that their country was not so far off as they alleged.

The wile of the Gibeonites succeeded. The men of Israel believed their story, and, by partaking of their victuals, pledged their faith to deal with them on terms of peace, and did so without asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord; this pledge being followed up by Joshua formally making peace and a league with them to let them live, and the princes of the congregation swearing to them. In all this the people of Israel did wrong, inasmuch as they were expressly forbidden to make a league or covenant with any of the nations of Canaan ; and this is plainly intimated in the narrative to which I have been referring, when it is said that the men of Israel replied to the Gibeonites, saying, "Peradventure ye dwell among us ; and how shall we make a league with you?" and also when it is said, that the men of Israel took of the victuals of the Gibeonites, "and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." We are not, indeed, to infer from this, that if they had asked counsel, they would have received a commandment to put the Gibeonites to death, notwithstanding that they sued for peace; for it may be gathered, I think, from the instructions given to the children of Israel by Moses, viewed in connection with certain incidental remarks on the subject to be found in this book of Joshua, that if any of the Canaanites sought mercy at the hand of Israel, it was to be granted, and that the sentence of utter extermination was to be executed only on those who defied the power, and actually opposed the armies of the living God. But if they had asked counsel at the mouth of the Lord, they would assuredly have been prevented from making a league with the Gibeonites in their public capacity as a nation or community, whereby in that capacity they should continue to possess their cities as they had done before; for this had been repeatedly and most expressly forbidden.

Herein, therefore, Israel erred. But though, in three days after, they discovered their error, and were disposed to take vengeance on the Gibeonites because of the fraud which they had practised ; yet in consequence of the oath which the princes of Israel had sworn to them, in the name of the Lord God of Israel, the people were restrained from touching them. But while Joshua delivered them from the wrath of the people, he did, with their own full consent, appoint them from that day forward to be "hewers of wood, and drawers of water, for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, . . . in the place which he should choose." The result, then, was, that the Gibeonites, being in league with the people of Israel, were under the protection of the God of Israel. But when Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, as we are told at the beginning of this chapter, had heard how Joshua had destroyed Jericho and her king, as also Ai and her king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Joshua, and were among them, he and his people feared greatly, "because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty ;" and he sent to other four kings, saying, "Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon : for it hath made peace with Joshua, and with the children of Israel." Thus threatened, the Gibeonites sent unto Joshua, saying, "Slack not thy hand from thy servants ; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us . . . So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour," having received an express assurance from the Lord, that the enemy should be delivered into his hand ; and it was while prosecuting, and in the view of completing his victory over these confederate forces, that "he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

The immediate occasion, then, of this memorable battle, between Israel and the five kings of the Amorites, was the call made upon Joshua to help and deliver the Gibeonites,—the very men who, by a skilful stratagem, had a short time before drawn him into a league with them, and whom he had delivered out of the hand of the children of Israel that they slew them not. The readiness, therefore, with which he and all the mighty

men of valour in the camp of Israel complied with the call for help which reached them, manifested what the world might regard as generous and honourable feeling; but what the devout reader will regard as a proof of the reverence which Israel felt for the oath which they had sworn in the name of the Lord their God. But the call thus made upon them, and the issue of the conflict which followed, involved higher and holier interests than any thing that affected their personal character. The Gibeonites had openly, in the face of all the nations of Canaan, abandoned the refuge which they had been wont to seek under the guardianship of their false gods, and had sought safety under the protection of the Lord God of Israel. When the five kings of the Amorites, therefore, combined to destroy the Gibeonites because they had made peace with Joshua, they did thereby virtually declare, that they would lay waste the refuge to which the Gibeonites had betaken themselves, and would take vengeance on what they, no doubt, regarded as their defection from the general confederacy of the nations of Canaan, in spite of the power to which they had transferred their confidence. The avowed purpose of these kings was thus a defiance of the power of God, and a denial of his sovereignty more daring than any that Joshua had yet witnessed in the land of Canaan. The men of Jericho did, no doubt, obstinately resist that power, when they trusted for protection against it to the strength of their walls; and the men of Ai thought that they might repel it when it actually assailed them. But the kings of the Amorites, in the face of these accumulating proofs of the supremacy of the God of Israel, daringly set themselves to dispute and to disprove that supremacy, by destroying those who had acknowledged and fled to it for safety.

Joshua, therefore, was called to undertake the defence and deliverance of the Gibeonites, not only that he might preserve his own character and good faith unsullied, but also that he might assert the sovereignty and vindicate the honour of the God of Israel. And, for the same reason, we can see how befitting it was that God himself should so directly and visibly interpose as to make it palpable to all that his own right hand and his holy arm had gotten him the victory. And so he was pleased to do; for not only did he assure Joshua, that

he had delivered these kings, with their armies, into his hand, and that there should not a man of them stand before him, but it is expressly said, that "the Lord discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah." And that the hand of God might be more visibly manifested in the overthrow of that daring confederacy, "it came to pass," we are told, "as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones, than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." We are informed, in a subsequent verse, that these five kings, after the overthrow of their armies, were brought alive to Joshua, and that Joshua commanded the captains of the men of war that were with him to come near, and put their feet upon the necks of the kings, and said unto them, "Fear not, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight."

But the most striking proof, in itself, of an immediate divine interposition, for the overthrow of the impious combination of the kings of the Amorites, and that which must have filled them with more amazement and terror than even the great stones that were cast down from heaven upon them, though not so immediately destructive, was the miracle recorded in the passage under consideration. It is a general and almost universal opinion, that the first form which idolatry assumed was the worship of the sun, and moon, and stars, or, as it is emphatically expressed in Scripture, the host of heaven. Nor will it be thought wonderful that it should have been so, when we consider the attention which the heavenly bodies must have attracted in all ages, and in all conditions of man, both from their own glorious appearance, and from their palpable effects on what does very nearly concern the every-day comfort and well-being of mankind. At all events, it is very plain from Scripture that the worship of the hosts of heaven was one, at least, of the forms which idolatry had assumed as early as the time of Moses. We find Job solemnly calling God to witness that he had never

paid divine honour to “the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness,”—declaring of such idolatry, that if he had been guilty of it, he would have “denied the God that is above.” And Moses, in the 4th chapter of Deuteronomy, addressed a warning to the people of Israel, which plainly implied, that when they came into the land of Canaan, they would find the worship of the sun, and moon, and stars, a common idolatry in that land: “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, (for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.) . . . Lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.” In like manner, in the 17th chapter, where he supposes the case of a man or woman being found guilty of idolatry within any of the gates which the Lord their God should give them, and declares the punishment which should be inflicted on such individual, the kind of idolatry which he specifies is that of worshipping the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven. And at a subsequent period in the history of Israel, when their iniquity became so great that God gave them up to be carried captive into another land, one of the many acts of idolatry that were charged against them was that of worshipping the host of heaven.

From all this it is very evident, I think, that the worship of the host of heaven had been one of the idolatrous practices of the inhabitants of Canaan before the period referred to in the passage under consideration, and continued to be practised long after. And if so, how appalling to the five kings and their armies must have been the miracle here recorded! Not only were they defeated in the sight of the gods whom they had been accustomed to worship and confide in, and left to perish without aid or pity; but these very gods were arrested in their wonted course, and made to stand still, as if to witness the overthrow and ruin of their deluded votaries. So far from helping, they were made to contribute to the destruction of those who had burned incense, and poured out drink-offerings to them: for “the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had

avenged themselves upon their enemies." By no conceivable miracle could the nations of Canaan have been more impressively taught how vain and unfounded was the confidence which they placed in their gods; and in no way could they have been more solemnly rebuked for their impious denial of the sovereignty of the Lord God of Israel, as the only living and true God.

It is thus that God still continues to deal with men, when, in the ordinary course of his providence, he renders the very objects on which they place their hearts, and from which they seek their chief happiness,—thereby putting them in the place of him,—the means of rebuking them for their idolatry, by showing them how little these objects of their idolatrous attachment can do for them in the time of trial, or how they may be made to prove the source of their bitterest suffering. And while the severity of God's judgment on the five kings of the Amorites and their armies might have proved great mercy to the remaining nations of Canaan, if their hearts had not been hardened against all conviction and against every salutary impression, that judgment was full of warning as well as of encouragement to Israel. As a new proof of the divine faithfulness, when Joshua was about to enter on his conflict with the nations of Canaan, there appeared to him a glorious person, who announced himself as the Captain of the Lord's host, and who plainly intimated to him, by the instructions which he gave concerning Jericho, that he was to take upon himself the conduct and the issue of that conflict. Already this promise had been fulfilled in the overthrow of Jericho and the destruction of Ai; but how much more gloriously in the case before us, where that mysterious person proved himself indeed the Captain of the Lord's host,—not only the guide and the guardian of the armies of Israel, who did elsewhere in Scripture bear the honourable title of the hosts of the Lord, but the sovereign Ruler of the hosts of heaven, exercising, in the government and direction of them, the same almighty power by which he had in the beginning spoken them into existence! While Israel were thus most solemnly warned against the sin of idolatrously worshipping those hosts which were but the servants of Him who had pledged his faithfulness to defend and fight for them, they were also most

emphatically assured, that under the guardianship of the Captain of these hosts, they would be employed rather than that Israel should fail in any enterprise which they undertook and prosecuted in faith,—an assurance which, on one occasion at least, was afterwards verified when the Lord discomfited Sisera and all his host before Barak, and when Deborah the prophetess celebrated the victory in these words, "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera."

But the miracle recorded in the passage before us possesses a far deeper interest than any that could attach to it, merely from its immediate bearing at the time, either on Israel, or on the Amorites. However severe might be the conflict between the contending parties, or however momentous the consequences to either which were suspended thereon, it was still, in itself, only a local contest—a struggle for the possession of a comparatively small portion of this earth's surface—one of the many combats which occupy so large a space in the history of every kingdom of the world. In this light it might have been regarded by surrounding nations at the time; and in no other light, perhaps, has it been seen by multitudes in future ages. But that the day should have been lengthened out,—that the sun should have stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, for the purpose of affording Israel time to achieve a complete victory over their enemies, was not only a proof that a divine power was exercised on their behalf, but a plain intimation that the cause in which Israel were engaged was one in which the world at large was concerned. The immediate interests involved in, and suspended upon that conflict might be local and limited; but the miracle did very impressively declare, that these interests were inseparably linked to another, to the advancement and establishment of which, every thing else, if needful, would be rendered subservient. In that miracle the Church will read the great truth, afterwards more fully revealed, and more explicitly stated, that the end for which this world is upheld is to place it under the government of Christ as Mediator,—that for him, and by him, all things were created,—that he has been appointed heir of all things,—and that in subserviency to the accomplishment of his mediatorial work, and the manifestation of the divine glory thereby, the government of this world is carried on. To the

Church at that time, this great truth could not have been more expressively announced than by the miracle here recorded. The great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, was not yet revealed; and even the prophets themselves were still inquiring diligently of whom, and of what time it was that "the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." But he had made himself known to Joshua and the Church as the Captain of the Lord's host; and in the miraculous interposition which the passage before us describes, he had given them the plainest assurance, not only that he held in his hand the government of the world, but that he held it in suberviency to his office and his work, as the Captain of the host of the Lord.

And how clear and full of meaning should that miracle be to us, now that we have had fully unfolded to us the great mystery of godliness! The manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, —God in very deed dwelling with men on the earth, is the most amazing of all the facts connected with the existence and the history of this world; and, viewed in connection with the purposes which it was to serve, the greatest, therefore, of all the ends for which we can conceive the world to have been created, and to be still upheld. And so the Scriptures teach us to regard it. It was intimated in the miracle which we are considering, as well as in the many wonderful works which, from the beginning, were wrought for the Church, those for whom Christ was to become incarnate, and suffer, and die,—works by which it was made manifest that the revolutions of mighty empires were overruled and directed for the accomplishment of the divine purposes concerning his people,—when "he reproveth kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." As a revelation of the character, and a manifestation of the glory of God, the mediatorial work of Christ is represented as that which angels regard with special admiration,—they "desire to look into" it. Nay, it is expressly declared that they have therein seen a peculiar display of the divine character and perfections; for it is said, that by the Church is made known to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places . . . the manifold wisdom of God." And independently of these, and of other passages already quoted,

the subjection of the world to Christ in his mediatorial character, as the great and ultimate end for which it was created, is very plainly asserted by the apostle in the sublime representation which he gives of the exaltation of Christ, and of the place which the Church occupies in that exaltation, when he prays that his Ephesian converts might know their privileges, and might experience the exceeding greatness of God's power towards them that believe; and adds, “according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

To believers, the subjection of the world to Christ as Mediator must ever be a most precious truth, furnishing a subject of devout contemplation on which they can never dwell but with admiration and delight, and affording them a refuge to which they may at all times betake themselves, and in which they will never fail to find rest to their spirits, when troubled and perplexed by dark dispensations. It is in the person and work of Christ that they see the only foundation of hope as guilty, perishing sinners; and it is in the divine character as revealed in Christ that they see the subject which they feel now to be the most interesting of all subjects of devout meditation, and which will exercise all the powers and faculties of their glorified nature throughout eternity. And if at any time they are thrown into perplexity by afflictive, and, what may appear to them, dark dispensations of Providence, should not the recollection of the precious truth, that all things were designed to be, and have been, put under Christ as Mediator,—as their almighty, gracious, and compassionate Redeemer,—remove, at least, all their distrust and dissatisfaction, though it may not fully explain all the divine dealings with them? For can they doubt that the very purpose for which all power has been committed to Christ in heaven and on earth can fail in any, even in the smallest point, of being accomplished? The passage before us shows what he will do, rather than permit his faithfulness to fail

towards those who by faith have placed themselves under his protection as the Captain of their salvation. And he has elsewhere placed his covenant with his people above even the covenant which he made with Noah, on behalf of the world at large, when he said, "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease;" for he has declared, by the mouth of his prophet Jeremiah, "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne. . . . If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant."

But the subject on which the doctrine of Christ's sovereignty, and on which the passage under consideration, as illustrative of that doctrine, is especially fitted to comfort and encourage the people of God, is the advancement and final triumph of the truth over all the arts and the assaults of the wicked one. And this is a subject on which the people of God do stand in need of great encouragement,—for it is a subject on which they are especially called to exercise faith. If the world was made for the purpose of being ultimately put under the government of Christ as Mediator; if from the beginning he ordered all things for the accomplishment of his great purpose of assuming our nature, tabernacling for a season among men, and suffering for the redemption of his Church; and if, for ages since that most marvellous of all events took place, he has actually been exalted to glory at the right hand of God, where, we are assured, he reigns, and must reign, till all his enemies are put under his feet, the question may sometimes occur, even to his own people, Why, instead of his sovereignty being recognised and acknowledged by mankind generally, and instead of his cause being the great object for the promotion of which men do universally vie with each other, should it, at this very day, be a melancholy fact, that the idea of all things being put under Christ as Mediator, and all the changes and revolutions in the affairs of men being determined and made subservient to the accomplishment of his mediatorial work, would be regarded by

a vast majority of mankind, if it were formally presented to them, as the most extravagant, the most absurd, the most fanatical of all ideas? It is so regarded by the world at large: for amidst the huge schemes of political and commercial enterprise, which are continually awakening the energies, and calling forth the efforts of men, how little, how insignificant, how contemptible, in their eyes, does that cause appear, which believers are taught to regard as the ultimate purpose for which the world was made, and for the accomplishment of which the world is sustained, and its ungodliness endured!

When the faith of believers is ready to fail them in contemplating the state of things as it exists, and which is apparently so different from what they may be inclined to think it should be, they might be reminded of the long period that elapsed before the first and great promise was fulfilled, when the Seed of the woman did bruise the serpent's head,—a period during which the Church was often weaker and more insignificant, both in numbers and in influence, than ever it has since been; and that yet, when the fulness of time came, and Christ did appear, made of a woman, there were not wanting proofs in abundance of the wisdom of God in the determination of the time when the great mystery of godliness was disclosed. But the true refuge of believers, when so perplexed, is the great truth intimated in the passage before us, and elsewhere more plainly asserted in Scripture,—that Christ reigns,—that he could with almighty facility overthrow all opposition to his cause,—put an arrest on the operations of men, however powerful, who set themselves, and take counsel against the Lord and against his anointed,—and that he will in due time vindicate his truth and faithfulness, when he takes to him his great power, and reigns,—when “they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust,”—when “the kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts,”—yea, when “all kings shall fall down before him;” and “all nations shall serve him.”

To those who are privileged to witness the glory of the latter day, all that now appears dark and mysterious in the condition of the Church will be cleared up, not only to the full vindication of the divine faithfulness, but to the glorious display of the divine wis-

dom,—and the contempt with which the cause of Christ has for so many ages been treated, in comparison with the manifold worldly schemes which have occupied the thoughts, and engrossed the time and labours of men, will be proved to have been perfectly consistent with the great truth, that the world was made to be put under Christ as Mediator. But believers who are not to see that day are required to live in the faith, and hope, and expectation of another, which they will see,—the day of final reckoning,—when all mysteries shall be cleared up, all disorders rectified, all derangements adjusted,—and when it will be proved, to the conviction of every intelligent creature in the universe, that “the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” And when, on that day, Christ shall “come in his glory,” and “in the glory of his Father,” “and all the holy angels with him,” and “shall sit upon the throne of his glory,”—when “before him shall be gathered all nations,” on whom he will pronounce sentence, a sentence of acquittal or of condemnation, according as they did or did not acknowledge him, his cause, and his people,—and when his judgment will be accompanied with “flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;” while he will be “glorified in his saints,” and “admired in all them that believe;”—when this glorious manifestation shall take place, who then will doubt, or venture to dispute the great truth, that the world was ultimately designed to be put under Christ as Mediator,—to be governed by him for the accomplishment of his mediatorial purposes, and judged by him at last in that character? It is fearful to think what the disclosures of that day will be,—how many proofs of Christ’s sovereignty as Mediator will then be brought to the remembrance of ungodly men and scoffers, which they will no longer be able to gainsay or resist, though here they laughed them to scorn, as the dreams of visionaries and fanatics,—and how many refuges of lies, in which hypocrites and formalists did here repose in complacency and self-confidence, will then be burnt and consumed. Let us not lightly conclude that we are prepared for the solemnities of that day. Let us not be satisfied with acknowledging Christ on this or the other point which may

happen to be the point of discussion in the age in which we live. Union to Christ by faith, devotedness to his service, readiness to take up his cross, and faithfulness in following him, will alone avail us on that day when he will be revealed, and when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open; and let us not, therefore, be satisfied till we have attained all the assurance which faith in his promises can give us, "that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

LXX.

THE TABERNACLE SET UP AT SHILOH.

JOSHUA XVIII. 1.

THE occasion here spoken of is the first, after the passage of Israel over Jordan, and their entering the land of Canaan, on which we find any mention made of the tabernacle. Whether, therefore, it had been set up in Gilgal, where, it would appear, Israel had encamped for about six years, cannot be determined. During that period we find the ark spoken of,—as when it was carried round the walls of Jericho seven days in succession; but we are not told whether the tabernacle had been set up, or where the ark was deposited. It is said, however, that after compassing the city on each of these days the people came into the camp, and lodged in the camp; and we may conclude, therefore, that while the congregation of Israel had themselves tents wherein to abide, the ark of God would have its tent also, even the tabernacle, which had been divinely planned mainly for its accommodation. But if the tabernacle was set up in Gilgal, it must have been only as a temporary resting-place, just as it had been during the journeyings of Israel in the wilderness, of which we are told, that “when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. . . . Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in

their tents, and journeyed not : but when it was taken up, they journeyed."

It is evident from this, that the signal given to them to pitch their own tents, was a signal also for their setting up the tabernacle ; and on this ground we may conclude that when they encamped in Gilgal they would, as a matter of course, set up the tabernacle there, as they had been wont to do at their successive resting-places in the wilderness. Nor was their encampment at Gilgal greatly different from their previous encampments on the other side of Jordan. They were, indeed, within the confines of the promised land. But they were barely so, Gilgal being very near to Jordan ; and, instead of settling down there permanently and in peace, they were only about to enter on a severe and protracted warfare for the conquest of the land ; and until that was, to a certain extent, accomplished, Gilgal was to them simply what Rephidim, or the plains of Moab, had been before,—a temporary encampment, to which they retired after their successive victories over the kings of Canaan. We are not to conclude, therefore, that the tabernacle was not set up in Gilgal, because we are not expressly told that it was ; for neither are we expressly told that it was set up in other places where Israel for a time encamped, or pitched their tents, though the general instructions given to Moses leave no ground to doubt that it was so. We may rather conclude, that, in obedience to these instructions, they set up the tabernacle in the place where they first pitched their tents in the land of Canaan, as they had been accustomed to do ; and that this is implied in what we are told in a preceding chapter, that "the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho."

If, then, the tabernacle was set up in Gilgal, it was only in the same temporary way as it had been at the successive encampments of Israel in their journeyings in the wilderness. But it is obvious that it was very different in regard to its erection at Shiloh, as stated in the passage before us. The fact that special mention is made of its being set up there, while it had often before been erected without any such mention of its being so, would itself seem to intimate that its establishment was to be more permanent there than it had ever been in any other place.

The solemnity, too, with which the work of erecting it had been gone about, would seem to imply that Israel had been taught to expect that Shiloh was the place which God had chosen to put his name there ; for we are told that "the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there." And from the subsequent history of Israel we learn that God did make Shiloh, for a long time, the resting-place of the ark, and of the tabernacle of his glory ; for we are told in the fourth chapter of 1 Samuel, that about three hundred years after the time referred to in the passage we are considering, when Israel were smitten before the Philistines, they said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims."

Israel, therefore, had good ground to believe, that when they set up the tabernacle in Shiloh, it was to be permanently established there ; and if so, it must have been to them a very solemn, as well as a very joyful event. It must have imparted to them a feeling of security as to their possession of the land, which even their successive victories could not have awakened. So long as the tabernacle was removed from place to place, they must have felt that their state was an unsettled one ; and though they could be in no doubt or uncertainty as to the issue of their warfare, and their final settlement in Canaan, still it had hitherto been an object of hope, rather than of actual possession. But from the moment they saw the tabernacle set up, not again to be removed,—for it was not removed, till, for the wickedness of their posterity, the Lord "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he pitched among men," the place where he set his name at the first,—from the moment they beheld the tabernacle thus set up, they saw therein a very plain intimation that the land was theirs, and a very sure pledge that it would continue to be held by them in peaceable possession, so long as they were faithful to God's covenant.

The land, it is true, was not, in point of fact, all subdued ; for "there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes,

which had not yet received their inheritance." But it was virtually subdued, inasmuch as they were in the actual possession of what they found to be abundantly large enough for their accommodation, seeing that Joshua had reason to reprove them for their slackness in going forward to the conquest of what remained,—while, in the very reproof which he administered, he plainly declared that they might enter on the possession of the whole, almost without any further struggle; always supposing, of course, that they were strong in faith, and of a good courage. "How long," said he, at the third verse of this chapter, "how long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?"

The land was thus spoken of as, in fact, already subdued, and as requiring only to be taken possession of: and this was still more emphatically intimated by the permanent establishment of the tabernacle in Shiloh; inasmuch as it was thereby declared that they did not need to be accompanied, in what remained of their conquest, by the tabernacle and the ark, as they had hitherto been,—that the fear of them and the dread of them had been already laid on the nations that were round about them,—that the prayer of Moses on the setting forward of the ark had now been fulfilled, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee,"—and that it only remained now to fulfil, in like manner, the prayer which he had been wont to offer up as often as the ark rested, "Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel;" or, as it is expressed by the psalmist at a later period, "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength."

The passage before us itself, indeed, expressly declares, that the conquest of the land was virtually accomplished; for when it is said that "the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there;" it is added, "and the land was subdued before them;" while we are told in the following context, that Joshua proceeded to divide the remainder of the land by lot among the seven tribes, as if there had been no inhabitants remaining to dispute with them the possession of it. "Give out from among you three men for each tribe; and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe

it into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God."

The setting up of the tabernacle in Shiloh was thus fitted, as it was no doubt designed, to give great confidence to Israel as to the subjugation of that portion of the land on which they had not yet entered. And it was equally fitted to convey the assurance, that, having taken possession, no power on earth could dislodge or drive them out; inasmuch as God himself had there fixed his tabernacle, the dwelling-place of his glory; virtually saying of Shiloh what was afterwards said of Zion, where the ark was finally placed, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell: for I have desired it." Well, then, might Israel assemble with joy and gladness to set up the tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh, and sing, with deeper feelings of admiration and gratitude than they ever before did, the song of Moses, "Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel."

But if the occasion was a joyful, it was also a very solemn one. It reminded them, in a very impressive manner, that their enjoyment of all the wealth and worldly comforts of Canaan was neither the only nor the chief purpose for which they had been put in possession of that land; that a higher and a holier object was the vindication of God's supremacy, and the establishment of his worship in a land which had long been defiled with the abominations of idolatry; and that their highest honour, their most exalted privilege, was their being permitted to pay him this worship at the place where he had taken up his abode by a visible symbol of his glory, and thus to bear witness for him against the idolatry of a world lying in sin.

During the six years that they had carried on war with the inhabitants of Canaan, and in the course of which they had smitten one-and-thirty kings, dealing with them as Moses had commanded that they should,—destroying their altars, breaking down their images, cutting down their groves, and burning their graven images with fire,—during that period they must have witnessed a great deal of the abominations of idolatry; which could hardly fail to awaken feelings of the liveliest gratitude to that divine love which had preserved them from the loathsome and degrading bondage under which these nations were held,

and to impress them with a deeper sense of their obligation, in having been chosen as the peculiar people of the living and true God. The very contrast between the revolting rites of idol-worship and the pure and holy worship of the God of Israel, must have given them a very exalted idea of the privileges which they enjoyed, in having access into the divine presence, and in receiving from the holy oracle the direct assurance of the divine favour and protection; and while they beheld, with gratitude and gladness, the permanent establishment of the tabernacle, in the place which God had chosen to put his name there, they must also have felt deeply the responsibility under which they were laid to keep the covenant of the Lord, who had borne them on eagle's wings, and brought them unto himself, that they might be a peculiar treasure unto him above all people—even a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

From what the Scriptures testify of the then existing generation of Israel, we cannot doubt that no small portion of them were alive to considerations like these; and that the idolatry which they witnessed, and into which their children were afterwards but too soon seduced, had the effect of deepening their feelings of awe for the purity and holiness of God, and of animating their zeal for the honour of his name. But there was another consideration which could not fail to awaken their reverence and godly fear, on seeing the tabernacle set up in Shiloh, as its permanent place of abode. It was set up there on the overthrow of idolatry, in token of God's taking possession of the land which idols had long usurped, and in consequence of the judgment which he had executed upon Canaan and her gods. But this judgment Israel themselves had been employed to execute. They were not merely witnesses of the wrath of God, which had been revealed against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the heathen; but they had, with their own hands, inflicted the righteous retribution whereby God vindicated his insulted majesty; and while the terrible scenes in which they had acted so prominent a part never could be effaced from their memory, they could as little think of them without being deeply awed by a sense of the rectitude and justice of God, as a jealous God,—a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity.

Nor could they, at such times, fail to remember the many

solemn warnings which Moses had given them against being ensnared by the idolatries of the land, and the many awful threatenings which he had denounced in the event of their being so ensnared. They had experienced the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of his promises; inasmuch as "there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." But they had seen also, that God was true to his threatenings; and in the very judgment which their own hands had executed on the Canaanites, they were reminded, in a manner the most solemn that can be conceived, that there stood recorded against them the very same threatenings, in the event of their forgetting and forsaking God. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (for the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you;) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth."

But besides the important purposes, in reference to the people of Israel, which were immediately served by setting up the tabernacle in Shiloh, there was thereby prefigured what the Church at that time could not clearly understand, but what, to the Church now, is full of interest and instruction. The tabernacle, as the residence of the ark of the covenant, and the dwelling-place of the cloud of glory which rested on the mercy-seat, was not merely a pledge of the divine presence and protection to Israel. It was a manifestation of the divine character also, and a revelation of the divine purposes regarding the Church.

We must bear in mind that the tabernacle, with all its splendid decorations and solemn services, was mainly designed to shadow forth Christ in the glory of his person and mediatorial work. The infinite excellence of his divine nature was set forth in the cloud of glory; in reference to which the apostle declares of him, that he is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." His incarnation, sufferings, and death, were set forth in the sacrifices which were slain and laid upon the altar of burnt-offering. The efficacy of his atonement, and the prevalence of his intercession on behalf of his people, were declared by the blood and the incense which

the high priest, himself a type of Christ, carried within the veil into the most holy place; whence he returned with authority to bless the people. Christ's fulfilment of all righteousness, in the accomplishment of his mediatorial work, was most significantly represented by the ark of the covenant, containing the two tables of the law, being placed under the mercy-seat;—thereby to intimate, that if God was revealed in a way of mercy to the guilty, it was because Christ, by his obedience unto the death, was to satisfy the demands of divine justice, magnify the law and make it honourable, and so become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Every thing, in fact, in and about the tabernacle and its services, had a special reference to Christ,—to his person and his work,—both during his humiliation, when he tabernacled for a season among men, and in his state of exaltation, now that he has entered into the holiest, even into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for his people.

When the tabernacle, therefore, was set up in Shiloh, it did very significantly prefigure the glorious things which were afterwards revealed concerning Christ. He did then, as it were, take possession of the land which was one day to be emphatically his own land, when he should appear there, God manifest in the flesh,—and take up his abode with Israel, as his own people, to whom he was afterwards to come,—though, when he came unto his own, his own received him not. In the erection of the tabernacle, a pledge was given, that in the fulness of time He, whom the tabernacle typified, should take up his abode among men, when the true Israel, they who had spiritual discernment given to them, should behold his glory,—the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And a pledge was also given, which was afterwards renewed and confirmed in a gracious promise from the lips of Christ himself, that he would be with his people always. From the beginning, indeed, Christ had always been with his Church, as the Scriptures do plainly testify; but that presence became, so to speak, more palpable, and its permanency was more distinctly pledged, from the day that the tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, not to be removed unless the backsliding or apostasy of Israel should render such an expression of God's righteous judgment necessary.

That nothing but backsliding on the part of Israel could ever have removed the ark and the tabernacle from the place where they were then set up, is expressly asserted by the prophet Jeremiah, when, speaking in the name of the Lord, he said to the people of his time, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." But the very name of the place might have conveyed to the Church—to those who had treasured up and remembered all former predictions and promises concerning Messiah—a very plain and distinct assurance, that the erection of the tabernacle there was designed to be permanent : for when "the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh," to "set up the tabernacle of the congregation there," they must have recollected that the name of the place—Shiloh—was one of the names by which the promised Deliverer—the Seed of the woman—the Angel which redeemed Jacob from all evil—the Angel of the covenant which guided Israel in the wilderness—was foretold in Jacob's benediction on Judah ; and that, as if to mark the coincidence more distinctly, it was foretold by Jacob of Messiah, whom he called Shiloh, that to him the people would be gathered, just as the tribes of Israel were assembled to the place named Shiloh, to set up the tabernacle : "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

Israel could not suppose that their father Jacob's prediction was exhausted, or completely fulfilled, by their being gathered together in Shiloh ; for Judah had not yet had a sceptre, nor had there been any lawgiver in that tribe, distinct from the other tribes of Israel. But they could hardly fail to see, in their own assembling together at Shiloh, a renewal, if not a fulfilment, of Jacob's prediction,—an intimation that there was no intention to remove the ark and the tabernacle from that place, till He should come to whom the gathering of the people should be,—even all the families of the earth, which are to be blessed in him.

To the Church now, when all figures have been explained, and all types have given place to the appearance of the great Antitype, the transaction recorded in the passage before us plainly teaches all that has now been stated, and much more.

We can now see, in the setting up of the tabernacle in Shiloh, a promise which has been fulfilled in the experience of God's people, the Church, in every subsequent age,—even the promise of Christ's presence with her, to rule over and defend her, and to impart to each of her members, who are members also of his body, all the benefits and blessings of his great salvation. Not more certainly did the devout and believing Israelites return from Shiloh, comforted with the assurance of the high priest that their sacrifice had been accepted, and that he had received authority to bless them, than true believers of all subsequent times have retired from the ordinances of Christ, having their conscience pacified by the sprinkling of his blood, and an answer to their prayers through his all-prevailing intercession. And not more securely did Israel abide in their habitation in Canaan, knowing that they were dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, than the Church may repose in peace, whatever calamities may come on the earth, in the assurance that their glorified and exalted Redeemer, their King and Head, is as truly in the midst of them as ever the symbol of his glory was present at Shiloh, or on Mount Zion,—and that in every place where he records his name, he will come unto them, and bless them.

In these remarks, it is assumed, of course, in regard to Israel, that they continued steadfast in God's covenant; and of the Church in later times, that she is faithful to her great Head. Had Israel continued to be what they were in the time of Joshua, and of the elders that outlived Joshua, what a glorious spectacle would the land of Canaan have presented! There, amidst the ungodliness and abominable idolatries of a world lying in sin,—sunk into the lowest depths of moral and spiritual debasement,—would have been seen a people entertaining holy and elevated conceptions of the majesty and supremacy of the only living and true God; living in greater security than walls or bulwarks could have afforded them,—the fear of them, and the dread of them, being put on all the nations that were round about them; their whole male population going up three times a-year to Shiloh, to present themselves before the Lord, while even the bitterest of their enemies, awe-stricken by an unseen power, dared not to molest the unprotected families whom the Israelites left behind them; and the whole nation exhibiting a

moral purity of character, as well as a state of worldly prosperity and comfort, which had never before been witnessed, or perhaps conceived of.

But, alas! too soon did the gold become dim, and the fine gold was changed. Scarcely had that generation been gathered to their fathers, when Israel began to backslide, and soon sunk into the very abominations on which their fathers had been employed to execute the righteous judgment of God. And with the very beginning of their declension, the threatenings of God began to be executed; for, one after another, their enemies gained the ascendancy over them, subjecting them to manifold, and most humbling privations, until, worn out by their oppression, they cried unto the Lord for help, and he graciously heard and sent them deliverance, raising up for them judges, by whom they were, for a season, rescued from the power of their enemies, and taught in their experience the difference between the service of the God of their fathers, and that of the false gods of the nations that were round about them.

Still, notwithstanding all their perverseness, God was slow to remove their glory and their defence which had been set up at Shiloh. As Christ in the days of his flesh wept over Jerusalem, unwilling to give it up to the desolation which its impenitence and unbelief had rendered unavoidable, so he manifested an unwillingness to lay desolate his place which was in Shiloh, where he had set his name at the first: and it was only when, instead of turning to him by penitence and faith, on being smitten before the Philistines, they presumptuously took the ark from its resting-place in the tabernacle at Shiloh, and carried it into the field of battle, trusting that its presence, in spite of their impenitence and unbelief, would secure them the victory,—it was only then, that Christ forsook the place where he had at first taken up his abode in the midst of his people, and made Shiloh a warning to Jerusalem afterwards, when, for a similar backsliding, he laid her waste also, and consigned his house there, with all its glory, to the flames. “Go ye now,” said the Lord to the house of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, by the mouth of his prophet Jeremiah, “go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And

now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight."

All this bears witness to the divine forbearance and long-suffering patience; but it bears witness also to his unchangeable rectitude and truth, in sooner or later executing, to the uttermost, the threatenings of his displeasure. And such has been the melancholy history of various branches of the Christian Church in succession. Where, for example, are now the seven churches of Asia, and many others, where a Paul planted, and an Apollos watered? These churches, while in a state of purity, and before they incurred the reproof which we find administered to them in the first chapters of Revelation, must, like Israel on their first establishment in Canaan, have presented a glorious spectacle in the midst of the heathen darkness by which they were surrounded. But when their glory became dim, through the prevalence of formality, or the spread of error; and when they continued, in spite of solemn warnings, to depart farther from their first love, till they became satisfied with a name to live while they were dead, and so ceased to testify for Christ, as Israel ceased to testify for the true God,—their candlestick was removed out of its place.

And is there, or has there ever been, a branch of the Christian Church,—a professedly Christian community or nation,—that would not do well to take warning by such examples? If we seriously ponder what our fathers have told us of the state of the Church in their days, we shall see but too much ground to fear that our own land may have treasured up for itself a similar visitation of the divine displeasure. At all events, individual believers will see enough to awaken a holy jealousy of themselves; for, in a general decay of religion, when formality takes the place of vital godliness in the great mass of professing Christians, true believers themselves do not escape altogether from the contagion of prevailing worldliness. It is as true now as it was in the days of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, that, when iniquity aboundeth, the love of many waxeth cold.

LXXI.

DEATH OF JOSHUA.

JOSHUA XXIV. 29.

It is generally admitted, that, so far as can be gathered from the sacred history, Joshua outlived Moses about five-and-twenty years. And, assuming this calculation to be correct, he must have been forty-five years of age at the time that the children of Israel departed from the land of Egypt. We find him, indeed, spoken of as a young man, subsequently to that event; for it is said in the thirty-third chapter of Exodus, while Israel were encamped in the wilderness of Sinai, that, on a certain occasion, "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, in the tabernacle of the congregation, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp; but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle." But there is nothing in this expression inconsistent with the supposition that Joshua was, at that time, forty-five years of age. Moses himself, when he was full forty years old, manifested all the generous ardour and impetuosity of youth, when he went forth from the court of Pharaoh to visit his brethren, and, finding one of them evil-entreated by an Egyptian, slew the Egyptian, and buried him in the sand. At the time, too, that he first became acquainted with Joshua, Moses was eighty years of age,—an age compared with which Joshua might well be called a young man. Assuming, then, that the generally-received opinion is correct, it suggests some interesting considerations re-

specting Joshua, and what he had not only witnessed but experienced of God's dealings with Israel. That experience far exceeded, in some respects, what even Moses himself had seen, or been concerned in. When, in consequence of killing the Egyptian, and burying him in the sand, Moses was compelled to flee from the face of Pharaoh, Joshua was five years of age. During the subsequent forty years, Moses dwelt with his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, in a state, obscure, no doubt, and humbling, and involving many sacrifices of worldly comfort to one who had spent the first forty years of his life in a court, the most refined, perhaps, in the world ;—but still a state of ease and safety, and favourable to the growth of that piety which, in spite of all the temptations and luxuries of Pharaoh's house, had marked his early years. Not only does it appear that he was reconciled to the humble and peaceful occupation of a shepherd ; but we might infer, I think, from the manner in which he at first received the divine command to return to Egypt, that he had no desire but to live and die in the land of Midian ; and that the unwillingness that he manifested to undertake the deliverance of Israel arose partly from the reluctance which he felt, to relinquish a place and an occupation to which he had become strongly attached. In the meantime, the condition of Joshua must have been very different. Long before his time, the kings of Egypt had begun grievously to oppress the children of Israel, for the purpose of preventing them from so increasing as to become formidable by their numbers,—setting “over them task-masters, to afflict them with their burdens,”—making them “to serve with rigour,” so that “they made their lives bitter with hard bondage.” Nor have we any reason to believe, that, after this system of oppression began, there was any relaxation of the rigour with which Israel were made to serve. On the contrary, when Pharaoh sought to slay Moses because of the Egyptian whom he had killed, may we not conclude, that he would visit his disappointed revenge on the children of Israel, on whose behalf he must have known that Moses had interposed, and that he would increase, rather than mitigate the severity with which they had been previously treated ? At all events, it appears that the bondage under which they groaned became more and more bitter, up to the time of

their deliverance: for we are told, that, "in process of time, the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage. And they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage; and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." For forty years, then, and these the darkest in the history of Israel's sojourning in Egypt, Joshua must have shared with his brethren all the hardships of that "house of bondage,"—all the severities of that "iron furnace." And thus, while Moses was acquiring, in the solitude of Midian, that humility and distrust of himself, and that exclusive reliance on God, which were to fit him for the mighty undertaking to which he was afterwards called; Joshua was, during the same period, trained by a still sharper discipline for the work which was in reserve for him,—that, being taught to endure hardness, he might prove to be a good soldier to fight the battles of the Lord.

Of the state in which Moses found Joshua when he went down into Egypt, or at what time he first selected him to be his constant attendant, as we find that he afterwards was, we have not been told. But at a very early period, within less than three months, indeed, after the departure of Israel out of Egypt, we find Joshua mentioned, and in such a way as obviously implies that he had previously enjoyed the special confidence of Moses, and had occupied also a distinguished place in the sight of the people. At the period to which I refer, Amalek, we are told, came, "and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek." This is just the language in which we might suppose Moses to have spoken, if it had been an understood thing, not only with Moses, but with the camp of Israel generally, that in the case of such an emergency as the attack made by the Amalekites, Joshua was, of course, the person to conduct any enterprise that might be required. It is remarkable, too, that on this, the first occasion on which Joshua's name is mentioned, he is called Joshua, though that was not his original name, as we learn from a subsequent passage in the history,—namely, in the book of Numbers,—where an account is given of the twelve men that were sent to spy out the land of Canaan, and where the names of the men are given, as they were known, and wont to be called in their

respective tribes and families. There Joshua is called Oshea; and, immediately after the enumeration of the men according to their names, it is added, "and Moses called Oshea, the son of Nun, Jehoshua," that is, Joshua. I speak not at present of the meaning of the name. To that I may have occasion afterwards to advert. I would only observe, that from the first, Moses, in writing of Joshua, gave him the name by which he was afterwards to be chiefly known and distinguished. All this would seem to imply that, even within three months after Israel had left Egypt, Joshua was known, and recognised by all his brethren, as the man that was prepared, under Moses, to lead them against their enemies, as often as they should be required to contend in battle for their attainment of the possession which God had promised them. On the occasion to which I refer, "Joshua," we are told, "did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek;" the people, it would appear, following him without doubt or distrust, though it was the first time that, after being born and reared under a state of the most debasing slavery, they had ever been called to meet an enemy in the field,—and then an enemy very powerful and warlike. "And Joshua," we are further told, "discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." All this indicates something very remarkable in the character of Joshua, as a person already, even at that early period, destined to occupy a very prominent place in the future history of Israel. The fact, that under his guidance they first engaged in battle with a heathen nation, which sought to intercept their progress towards Canaan, if not a distinct prediction and pledge that he was ultimately to subdue and put them in possession of that land, was, at least, fitted to give Israel great confidence in him, as their commander, in any subsequent conflict in which they might be called to engage. But Joshua's victory on that occasion was designed for more, than merely to impress the people of Israel with confidence in his skill and courage as their captain. It was plainly declared by God himself to be a pledge of Joshua's future triumphs; for we are told, that after Joshua had "discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword," "the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And

why rehearse it in the ears of Joshua, but that Joshua had already been appointed by divine authority to the office which he afterwards held and executed? Neither Moses nor Joshua could, at that time, foresee the circumstances in which the one succeeded the other; for Moses had not yet, nor for a long time after, forfeited his right, or lost his hope of entering into the land of Canaan. But the command to write in a book, and to rehearse in the ears of Joshua, God's solemn sentence against Amalek, was a plain intimation that Joshua was to survive Moses, and was to have the responsibility, if not of carrying that sentence into full effect, at least of charging Israel with its execution. And all this taking place within so short a period after Israel had left Egypt, testified how graciously Joshua had been trained in the school of affliction, and at how early a period he was appointed to the high and honourable office of leading the armies of Israel, giving them the victory over their enemies, and finally putting them in possession of the inheritance which God had promised unto their fathers.

But the effect of the discipline of trial and affliction through which Joshua passed, during the first forty years of his life, did not consist merely in his being thereby trained to the patient endurance of hardship, and the fearless encounter of danger. There are various, and very plain intimations given us of his piety,—of his reverence for God, and his respect for Moses, God's servant, and of the satisfaction which he enjoyed in being permitted to draw near to the dwelling-place of the divine glory. After the event to which I have been referring, as the first time that Joshua's name is mentioned, the next occasion on which we are told any thing concerning him is, when the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me into the mount, and be there : and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written ; that thou mayest teach them." "And Moses," it is said, "rose up, and his minister Joshua : and Moses went up into the mount of God." And that Joshua was admitted to make a nearer approach to God than any of the people, or even the elders of Israel were, is evident from what is immediately added, for Moses "said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you." And that Joshua was somewhere in the mount during the forty days while Moses

communed with God, is also evident from the fact, that when, at the end of that period, Moses was commanded to get him down, because the people had corrupted themselves, and had made them a molten calf, and were worshipping and rejoicing before it, and when, in obedience to this command, he turned and went down from the mount with the two tables of the testimony in his hand, it is said, that "when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp,"—plainly implying that Joshua had been all that time with Moses in the mount. It was undoubtedly a very high honour that was thus put upon Joshua, in his being permitted to accompany Moses where even the elders of Israel were forbidden to approach. But we have an intimation, also, of the value which Joshua put upon the privilege of being thus allowed to draw near to God; for we find that on the same occasion, when Moses pitched the tabernacle without the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation, whereunto every one that sought the Lord resorted, Moses himself having there spoken with the Lord, "turned again into the camp, but his servant Joshua . . . departed not out of the tabernacle." And of Joshua's affectionate respect and veneration for Moses we have one example, which is abundantly sufficient to manifest the zeal which he felt for the honour and authority of his master. It was when Moses, by the divine appointment, commanded seventy of the elders of Israel to assemble unto him at the tabernacle of the congregation, that the Lord might take of the spirit that was upon Moses, and put it upon them; and when it was told Moses, in the hearing of Joshua, that two of their number, Eldad and Medad, who had not come as they were bidden to the tabernacle of the congregation, but remained in the camp, did nevertheless prophesy there, Joshua answered and said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." The feeling which dictated this suggestion was clearly seen and beautifully expressed by Moses, when he said to Joshua, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!"

From all this it is evident that there was in the character of Joshua a rare combination of piety, humility, and courage;—and these graces and virtues appear to have been so matured,

even from the earliest period at which he is introduced to our notice, that we are naturally led to look back on the circumstances in which he had been placed in early life, as the means which God had employed for the formation of a character especially fitted for the extraordinary work to which he was afterwards to be called. And such has often been God's method in training individuals for occupying prominent places and conducting difficult enterprises in his Church. It is not merely that difficulties and dangers may, in some instances, have a tendency to foster courage, and strengthen the power of endurance in the natural character. It is the power of enduring, as seeing God who is invisible, which constitutes the divine training whereby Moses and Joshua were respectively fitted for the place and the work assigned to them. But it is in the very darkness of affliction and trial that they who are the subjects of this divine training see God most clearly, and are brought to cleave to him most closely; and when, at such seasons, he does interpose for them, how must such interposition go to confirm their faith and to strengthen their patience! If, for example, during the last forty years of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, when their bondage was becoming every day more bitter, Joshua had been enabled to live in the faith of the promise made to his fathers, that God would visit his people, and bring them up out of the land of Egypt into a good land and a large, with what indomitable courage might we not suppose him to be actuated, from the moment he saw Moses presenting himself before the people of Israel with the rod of God in his hand, and furnishing unequivocal evidence that he had come with a divine commission for the deliverance of his brethren! The darker and the more desperate that the condition of Joshua, as one of a nation of oppressed slaves, might appear to the eye of sense to be, before redemption came, the stronger would be the confidence and the more untiring the patience with which he would meet all future dangers and endure all future trials. And so it is, even in the more ordinary states of the Church, that the servants of God are prepared for special services; for how often is it found that they who have themselves endured the severest spiritual conflict or the sharpest worldly affliction,—who have known what it is to be in deep waters, out of which they cried unto God,—have been

eminently blessed to be the instruments of imparting consolation to many an afflicted soul, and might, according to the measure of grace given unto them, adopt the language of the apostle: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God!" •

But in taking a general view of the character and office of Joshua, we are reminded of a higher and a still more glorious subject than any thing that he or any mere human agent ever achieved. Viewed in his public capacity, as the successor of Moses, and as conducting Israel into the land of Canaan, he is generally regarded as a type of Christ; and various considerations seem to intimate that he was designed to be so regarded. His very name imports this. Originally, as I have already had occasion to remark, it was Oshea, and it was changed by Moses into Jehoshua, or Joshua. In its original form it signified, Saviour—as changed by Moses, it means, Jehovah the Saviour; and in the language of the Old Testament, it corresponds to the name Jesus in the New. Indeed, we find two occasions on which Joshua is called in the New Testament, Jesus, namely, in the 7th chapter of the Acts, and in the 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The name of Joshua, therefore, taken in connection with the great enterprise to which he was appointed, would naturally lead us to conclude that he was intended to typify and prefigure Christ, who, as the Saviour of his people, gives them the victory over their spiritual enemies, and places them at last in the heavenly inheritance. And all this is confirmed, I think, by the apostle, who, in the passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews already referred to, shows that there is another rest promised in Scripture to the people of God, besides that to which Joshua brought the children of Israel,—but thereby very plainly intimating that the one was typical of the other. We are warranted, then, to consider Joshua, in his public capacity, as a type of Christ; and though we may not be at liberty to fix on all the points of Joshua's history as furnishing some resemblance to Jesus, yet, bearing in mind that Joshua was a typical person, we can hardly read his history, I think, without being every-

where reminded of Him who is emphatically the Captain of salvation to his people. When we read, for example, of the sufferings of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, who sighed by reason of their bondage, and cried out till God heard their cry, and had respect unto them,—when we reflect that, for forty long years, Joshua must have been their companion in affliction, sharing in all their oppression,—and when, after enduring all this, we find him prepared and qualified to lead the people of Israel to battle against their enemies, discomfiting Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword,—we are naturally reminded of Him who was really the Saviour of Israel, and of whom it was written by the prophet, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old;” and of whom also the apostle has said, that as Captain of his people’s salvation, he was made “perfect through suffering.” When we read of Joshua’s untiring attendance on Moses, whose servant he was,—on his zeal for his master’s honour as the lawgiver of Israel,—on the promptitude and fidelity with which he executed every command which Moses issued,—and on the satisfaction which he felt in being near God, departing not out of the tabernacle when other duties did not call him thence,—we can hardly fail to think of Him who, being made under the law, became the servant of the great Lawgiver,—who undertook not only to fulfil the law, but to magnify and make it honourable,—who declared that it was his meat and his drink to do the will of Him that sent him,—who, in obedience to that will, deliberately laid down his life a ransom for those whom the Father had given him to redeem,—who delighted so much in being near to God, that, after days of unremitting toil, and weariness, and hunger, he spent nights in prayer in the solitude of the desert,—and of whom, because of his concern for the divine glory and the honour of the divine institutions, it was written in his own name, by the prophet, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” I do not say that it was the mind of the Spirit to set forth Joshua as in these points a type of Christ. But I confess I cannot read and meditate on the parts of Joshua’s history and the traits of Joshua’s character to which I have been adverting, without having my thoughts

carried out to Him in whom all the excellences which Joshua, through grace, was enabled to exhibit, were manifested in unsullied purity,—in absolute perfection. And I think that the suggestions thus presented are of a salutary kind. We can easily conceive that the confidence which Israel were required to place in Joshua, when, within a few months after leaving Egypt, he led them out to battle against Amalek, would be greatly strengthened by the recollection that he who so led them had not many weeks before been a fellow-sufferer with themselves; and that their conclusion must have been, that, be the dangers and toils of warfare what they might, their being led by Joshua was a proof that they were nothing compared to the misery from which they had escaped, and not worthy to be compared with the rich inheritance to which they were required to fight their way. And is not this the very consideration that animates believers still to fight the good fight of faith? He who leads them into the field knows, as they never knew or can conceive of, the misery of that state in which they once were, when they lay under the condemning sentence of the divine law, bound over to endure to the uttermost the punishment which that law had denounced upon them as sinners; and tells them that whatever they may have to encounter in following him, it is less than nothing compared with the evils from which they have made their escape,—and, moreover, that their present afflictions are not worthy to be named in comparison of the glory that is hereafter to be revealed. But, animating as all these considerations are, there is one still more affecting, even this,—that He who thus seeks to animate them is himself their fellow-sufferer,—that he is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as they are,—and that having thus “suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

In regard to the subsequent events in Joshua's history, they are so plainly typical of Christ and his mediatorial work, and must be so familiar to all who have read that history with any attention, that I need not at present enter upon them in detail. But, as we have seen that the early life of Joshua is fitted to suggest reflections most salutary to believers individually, so his latter end will be found to be full of instruc-

tion. Among the last words which Joshua spoke to Israel, we find him saying, "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." To the humble, and penitent, and broken-hearted of the people, this must have been a very solemn statement; and while the self-righteous,—those who had never been truly convinced of their guiltiness, and had never really felt their misery,—might treat it lightly, or, at the most, wonder what Joshua could mean, and might be forward to say, in the fulness of their self-confidence, Nay, but we will serve the Lord; the truly humble would find no refuge but in looking by faith to those sacrifices wherein was set forth the shedding of that blood without which there could be no remission.

And the language in which Joshua addressed Israel is the language in which Christ addresses us now. All are naturally inclined to rest on their own righteousness, and to reckon on acceptance with God, if they can only maintain such a character as is generally esteemed by their fellow-men virtuous and respectable. The very fact that Christ came to die for sinners is itself a most solemn, as well as intelligible declaration to all, "Ye cannot serve the Lord," so as to be accepted of him; "for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God." Plain as this declaration is, the self-righteous and stout-hearted will not understand or believe it; and many who do believe it are ready to surrender themselves to despondency, and to relinquish all hope of ever being able to offer any service which God will accept. Misapprehending the nature of the Gospel, and held in bondage by a legal spirit, whereby they seek to have some warrant in themselves for coming to Christ, they feel as if they were excluded from any share in the blessings of his salvation. And yet, when he tells them that they cannot serve the Lord, it is just for the purpose of so thoroughly convincing them of the utter impossibility of ever finding acceptance with God, on the ground of any righteousness of their own, that they may be persuaded to come, with all their guiltiness and sin, unto Him who has shed the blood that can cleanse them from it all.

And if Joshua's last words are thus full of reproof and instruc-

tion still, so his last act is equally rich in comfort and encouragement. That act was to "let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance." And with what confidence might not believing Israelites have so departed! Joshua had been set apart to bring Israel into and to put them in possession of the promised inheritance; this was intimated to them in the day that he first led them out to battle against Amalek, in the plains of Rephidim; and from that day forward, not one word which God had spoken concerning them had failed,—all had come to pass, as they knew in all their hearts, and in all their souls. Joshua's death, then, was itself a pledge or proof that Canaan was conquered; for if it was not, then Joshua had died before his time,—before he had achieved the very conquest for which he had been prepared, and to which he had been expressly appointed. The land, indeed, was not all actually theirs in possession; but it was theirs as certainly as if they had possessed it, if they only understood, and believed, and acted on God's word;—and they who did so understand and believe it must have returned from the great assembly at Shechem joyful and glad of heart, and in the full assurance that they had only to go up and take possession of what yet remained unsubdued. And such is the legacy which Christ in his death has bequeathed to all who believe. That death is not merely a proof, as Joshua's was to Israel, that the inheritance has been won; it was itself the procuring cause of that inheritance. And while Christ did in his death triumph over principalities and powers, and gave a pledge of his final triumph over the world itself, by subduing all the kingdoms of the earth under him, he virtually said to every individual of his followers, Get thee to thine inheritance. The full enjoyment of that inheritance is indeed future; but believers do enter upon it even here. In the enjoyment of peace with God,—in the freedom with which they are admitted to hold fellowship with him,—and in the growing sanctification of their nature,—they not only have a foretaste, but they are in possession, to a certain extent, of the heavenly inheritance, to the hope of which they have been begotten again, the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Trials may yet await them, and conflicts they may still have to maintain with the spiritual enemies that would oppose their progress heavenward; but if their eye be fixed on Him

who is the Captain of their salvation, their victory is certain, be the struggle what it may; for he has already "overcome the world," in which they may experience tribulation; and they shall at last be "more than conquerors through him that loved them."

LXXII.

JUDAH TO GO UP FIRST AGAINST THE ENEMY.

JUDGES I. 1, 2.

IN consequence of the death of Joshua, the people of Israel were placed in new and, in some respects, trying circumstances. Previously to that event, they felt comparatively little of the burden of anxiety and care connected with the difficulties which they had encountered, and the enterprises which they had undertaken. For the successful issue of all these, they had been accustomed to look first to Moses, and, after his death, to Joshua, as mainly responsible. In the one or other of these individuals, they had a divinely-commissioned leader,—one who transacted with God for them, receiving on their behalf the communications of the divine will, and authoritatively giving forth instructions with which it was alike their interest and their duty to comply, and which they never ventured to disobey or dispute without being taught the folly, as well as the guilt of rebelling against God. They were thus, in a great measure, exempted from all anxiety and concern about what they were to undertake, or about the issue of any undertaking when they did engage in it; and but for the unbelief and discontent to which they did but too frequently give way, they might have felt, in regard to all the marvellous events which befell them, that they had only to stand still and see the salvation of God. The removal, then, of such a leader, without any one with a similar commission to succeed him, must at any time have been a very solemn event to Israel, involving what might have appeared to them an irreparable loss. But at

no period, perhaps, would that loss have been more severely felt than on the death of Moses or Joshua; for at no period was the privilege of having such a mediator to transact with God on their behalf more highly estimated by Israel. They were not, indeed, so left on the death of Moses, for Joshua succeeded him; and when Joshua died, Israel were already in possession of Canaan to a very great extent. But there still remained much land to be possessed, and enemies, numerous as well as powerful, to be vanquished; and if Israel had been brought, as it appears that they had been, into an humble, submissive, and self-diffident state of mind, which contrasted strongly with the rebellious spirit of their fathers, they would be the more ready to feel and to lament the loss of one who might, as Moses and Joshua, tell them God's mind, and leave them nothing to do but to hear and obey God's command. Both Moses and Joshua, indeed, had been commissioned to bequeath to them, as their legacy, an inheritance of promises so large and so sure that they had only to believe them, and all difficulties and dangers would disappear.

But even with all this, it was still a sore trial to be deprived of a head and counsellor, in whose instructions the true Israel,—those who composed the Church, the real people of God,—had confidence, as the immediate communications of God; and whose commands even the mere nominal Israel,—those who were mere formalists, and who never either looked or longed for any thing beyond a worldly inheritance,—dared not to disobey. The true believers of Israel, however numerous, must have formed but a portion, perhaps not the larger portion, of the whole congregation,—the twelve tribes. While, therefore, they would feel jealous of themselves, lest, when deprived of a commander who was as ready to reprove as to encourage, they might be drawn away from their steadfastness, they could not be insensible to the danger of their ungodly brethren being set free from the restraint which had till then been laid upon them, and of their casting off the obligations under which they had been brought to continue to bear testimony for God against the idolatry of the nations of Canaan, in the way that Moses and Joshua had prescribed. They had, no doubt, access to God; for provision had been made, through the high priest, for asking counsel of the Lord in all emergencies; and if such counsel were asked after the

prescribed order, a gracious answer would assuredly be given. But on Joshua's decease, there seems to have been no individual whose special duty it was thus to consult God; and Israel, therefore, were put to the trial as they had never before been, inasmuch as all were alike responsible for carrying into effect God's revealed purposes regarding the inhabitants of Canaan, and all were now to be proved, whether they would keep the way of the Lord, and do his commandments or no.

The result of this trial was, in the first instance, favourable to the character of the people generally. "It came to pass," we are told, "that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" This inquiry is spoken of as coming from the people at large; and the inquiry itself plainly intimated that they held themselves bound to carry into effect the divine command, which had been so frequently and so solemnly inculcated upon them by Moses and Joshua, that they should cut off or drive out the inhabitants of Canaan, destroying their altars, and breaking down their images, and cutting down their groves, and burning their graven images with fire. They did not ask the Lord whether they were to go up against the Canaanites to fight against them; but, assuming that, as a matter of course, they were to do so, inasmuch as they had been repeatedly warned against relaxing in their efforts till they should have driven out all the inhabitants, and had already incurred the rebuke of Joshua, on a former occasion, for their slackness in going up to possess the land, the subject of their inquiry was, which of the tribes should resume the war against the remaining nations of Canaan. To this inquiry an explicit answer was given: for "the Lord said, Judah shall go up;" and a very gracious promise was annexed: "Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand."

It has been supposed that the tribe of Judah was selected to renew the conflict with the Canaanites, because it was the largest of the tribes, and had, moreover, received for its inheritance a larger proportion of the land than had yet fallen to the lot of the other tribes,—so that, being in the full possession of all that was needful for themselves, it was befitting that they should be the first to extend the conquest of the country, for the settlement of the other tribes. On this principle it was, that the

children of Reuben and the children of Gad, who received their inheritance on the other side Jordan, did, nevertheless, go over armed before the children of Israel, till the other tribes were brought unto their place. But a more probable reason, I think, for the selection of Judah to take the lead in the warfare which was still to be carried on, is to be found in what had been previously recorded concerning that tribe. Jacob, in his dying benediction, had said, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies: thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The Sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

In accordance with the distinction which this prophetic blessing bestowed on Judah was the place which that tribe occupied in the marching of Israel through the wilderness; for we are told that the three tribes which constituted the camp of Judah set forward first, as often as the people of Israel took their journey from one encampment to another. And the blessing of Moses was to the same effect, when he said, "Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies." In the honour and the precedence thus assigned to Judah, there was a prediction of what we find afterwards recorded, when it is said, in the fifth chapter of First Chronicles, "Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler,"—though the birthright had become Joseph's,—or, as the Psalmist expresses it, "The Lord chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion, which he loved. . . . He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds, . . . to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance."

And need I add that all this had a reference to Christ,—that he was the source of all the honour and distinction which were put upon the tribe from which he was to spring,—and that all the great things which were spoken of or achieved by Judah were so many promises and types of Him who was to come forth thence "to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have

been from of old, from everlasting." And so it was, I conceive, with the revelation contained in the passage before us. The very appointment of Judah to recommence the conflict with Canaan did itself intimate to Israel where their strength lay. It was virtually an assurance, that though Joshua was no more, and though no individual had been appointed to occupy his place, yet the Captain of the Lord's host, who appeared to Joshua in the plains of Jericho, who had already been foretold, and was afterwards to be revealed as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, would assuredly fight for them; and that he it was who said, "Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand."

On the strength of this promise, then, Judah did go up against the Canaanites, and for a time did valiantly, and prospered. There was much, indeed, in their new circumstances to excite them to great exertion. To be left without a leader, as we have already seen, was itself fitted to solemnise their minds, and to impress every true Israelite with a sense of responsibility which he had never before felt. The covenant, too, which Joshua made with them, when, as the last act of his life, "he set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem,"—and with his dying breath charged them, saying, "This stone shall be a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God,"—must have been fresh in their recollection, keeping alive a holy and salutary fear of being found unsteadfast in God's covenant. And if there was much that was thus fitted to cherish an humble frame of spirit, there was a great deal also to animate and encourage them. They still enjoyed the presence of Caleb and other aged saints, who could not only testify, but speak as none but true believers could speak of all the mighty acts of the Lord. And that these holy men did greatly strengthen the hands and encourage the hearts of the people is expressly declared; for we are told, once and again, that "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel."

In their very first enterprise, too, they witnessed a testimony to the sovereignty of God, fitted alike to instruct and to encourage them,—a testimony extorted from one of the idolatrous

kings whom they vanquished; for it is here related, that when, after the defeat of his army, Adoni-bezek fled, and Israel pursued him, "and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes," he was compelled to acknowledge the righteous retribution with which the God of Israel had visited him: "Threescore and ten kings," said he, "having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died."

And I cannot help observing here, in passing, that in this first commission which Judah received, and by which they were honoured above the other tribes, God gave intimation,—clear to us, I think, though it might not be so to Israel at the time,—of his purposes regarding Jerusalem as the place which he was to choose to put his name there; for it is recorded, that "the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire." It is true, the portion of Jerusalem which lay within the tribe of Benjamin was not wrested out of the hands of the Jebusites, as we learn from the twenty-first verse of this chapter; and during the degeneracy of Israel that soon after followed, the part which Judah had subdued seems to have been again taken possession of by the enemy,—for it was not until the time of David that it came wholly and permanently into the hands of Judah. But when it at last did so, it could not fail, I think, to be regarded as the fulfilment of the prediction or pledge given to Judah at the very commencement of their warfare, but which their unbelief and disobedience prevented from being sooner fulfilled,—a prediction that Jerusalem was one day to be the city of the great King, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory, whence righteousness was to go forth as brightness, and salvation as a lamp that burneth. All this was not, indeed, expressly foretold, and could not, therefore, be known to Judah at the time; but to the Church of after times, it has furnished an interesting and instructive proof of the divine power and faithfulness, and a pledge of the due fulfilment of all the predictions of Messiah's conquests; and considering what is repeatedly intimated of Jerusalem as a stronghold of the Jebusites, even a partial and temporary possession of it by Judah must have been an encouraging

proof of the faithfulness of the promise, "Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand."

Such, then, being the obligations under which Judah felt and acknowledged themselves to be laid to renew the conflict with Canaan, and such the encouragement which they had to prosecute the work assigned to them with vigour, what might we expect to find in their subsequent history but one unbroken succession of victories, till, so far as their commission went, the land was delivered from the burden of idolatry under which it had so long groaned? And for a time such promised to be the result of their undertaking. But, alas! too soon was the prospect changed! After an enumeration of many victories, in which special mention is made of Caleb, who, it appears, manifested in old age the faith and fortitude which distinguished him in early life, we are told, at the nineteenth verse of this chapter, that "the Lord was with Judah, and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." And why were the chariots of iron invincible? Was there any limitation in the promise given to Judah,—any thing said from which he might have inferred, that it was not the divine purpose that he should cast out the inhabitants of the valley, and that it was vain for him to attempt the subjugation of those who had chariots of iron?

Nothing of all this is to be found in the commission which Judah received, or in the promise with which it was accompanied. Both were in the most unqualified terms: "Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." Moreover, in the very verse in which it is said, that Judah "could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron," it is also said, that "the Lord was with Judah,"—a declaration which necessarily shuts us up to the conclusion that the want of power was not the cause of Judah's failure in driving out the inhabitants of the valley, inasmuch as God had not forsaken him, neither had he limited the promise of divine aid which had been given him.

But evidently the faith of the children of Judah had failed. They had begun to measure the strength of the enemy by their own strength; and judging by sense, and reasoning as carnal

wisdom is wont to reason, they concluded, and concluded rightly, if the promise of divine aid was left out of the calculation, that they were utterly unfit to encounter the chariots of iron.

And that this was the true reason of Judah's failure is confirmed, I think, by what is recorded in the subsequent part of this, and the beginning of the following chapter ; for after it is stated of almost all the tribes of Israel, in succession and by name, that they did not drive out the inhabitants from the portions which had fallen to them by lot, and that in the case of one of them, the tribe of Dan, the Amorites forced them into the mountain, and would not suffer them to come down into the valley,—just as in the case of Judah,—the history goes on to tell us, that “an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers ; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land ; ye shall throw down their altars : but ye have not obeyed my voice : why have ye done this ? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you ; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.”

Here God expressly charged Israel with disobeying his commandment, inasmuch as, with his solemn promise that he would never break his covenant with them, they had failed to do so and so. When it is said, therefore, that Judah could not prevail against the chariots of iron, and that Dan was forced into the mountain, and was not suffered to come down to the valley, it just means that they distrusted God's word, and that their faithlessness produced its natural, its necessary fruit,—disobedience. It is, no doubt, true that other reasons are assigned for the Canaanites not being entirely driven out before the children of Israel. It is said that God left these nations that through them he might prove Israel, whether they would keep the way of the Lord to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. It is also said that these nations were left “that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war,”—at the least, such as before knew nothing thereof. But with these secret, unrevealed purposes of God, Israel had nothing to do. They were commanded not to leave

these nations, for the purpose of fulfilling any of God's designs, but to root them out. That was the one great object with which they had to do, and at which they were constantly to aim; and if God fulfilled other and beneficent purposes through their delinquency, this is only to say, that he dealt very graciously with them,—that he did not punish them as their iniquities deserved,—that in the midst of wrath he remembered mercy. It is, in fact, one of the many illustrations to be found in Scripture of the great truth that God exercises a most holy, and wise, and powerful control over all his creatures, and over all their actions,—that he maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and restraineth the remainder of his wrath,—and that though events are fixed by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, yet it is with wicked hands that men do bring these events to pass.

Such, I think, was the failure of faith, and consequent disobedience, on the part of Judah, in the case before us. God, foreseeing, with unerring knowledge and infallible certainty, the defection of Judah and of all the tribes of Israel, had provided for turning that defection to account for the accomplishment of other great and important purposes. But with these purposes Judah had nothing to do, more than we have with the yet unrevealed decrees of God as our rule of duty. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Let us, then, consider the conduct of Judah in having so soon fallen away from their zeal, and stopped short in a course on which they had entered with such high promise; and let us endeavour to draw from their example the instruction, whether in the way of warning or of reproof, which it is fitted to convey.

And none, I think, who know much of their own heart, will have much difficulty in finding in that example matter of profitable meditation. Their own experience will, perhaps, tell them, that it is not difficult to explain the defection of Judah, and of the tribes of Israel generally, as it is here set forth. They were placed in circumstances in which zeal for the honour and glory of the God of their fathers, as the only living and true God, was the great motive which could alone sustain them in

the conflict in which they were engaged. Their own necessities, which, on their first entering on the land of Canaan, must have powerfully operated in animating them to exertion, had ceased by the time referred to in the verses before us to be so urgent. Even before Joshua's death, they had been put in possession of an inheritance which seems to have furnished them, in some good measure, with the comforts of a settled dwelling-place; and after the new victories recorded in this chapter, they must have been placed beyond the necessity of any farther extension of their conquests, in so far as regarded their own accommodation and convenience. If, therefore, they persevered in maintaining the conflict, as they had previously done, it must have been mainly from a regard to the authority and zeal for the honour of God, whose sovereignty they were the appointed instruments of vindicating in the sight of the heathen.

But is it wonderful that this motive should have become weak and inoperative? However melancholy the fact that it should have proved to be so, I fear that none who know themselves, or who are acquainted with the history of the Church, even God's professing people, will be surprised at the fact itself. They will easily understand how the zeal of Israel would very soon cool, and how formidable opposition would become in their eyes, when they had nothing to contend for but the glory of God. The more that their own comforts increased, the less inclined would they be to encounter danger or to contend with difficulties. They would soon become ingenious in finding out excuses for evading duties which required sacrifices of personal ease, and would readily prove, to their own satisfaction, that it was not needful to carry their laborious and self-denying efforts any farther than they had already done. They were now firmly established in the land; they had driven out the inhabitants of the mountain, and taken possession of their cities, and fields, and vineyards; the sovereignty and faithfulness of the God of their fathers had thus been asserted and vindicated; and without much difficulty, they would persuade themselves that it was neither necessary nor reasonable that they should enter on the hopeless undertaking of driving out the inhabitants of the valley, with whose chariots of iron they had no means of contending. With all this, they might still profess to worship God as the only

true God ; and there is no reason to doubt that they did so ; for it was not till after the death of all that generation that they actually fell away to the worship of false gods. But having subdued the land to the extent that was needful for their own comfort and convenience, they would be ready enough to conclude that they had done enough also, even all that was possible or could reasonably be expected of them, for the vindication of God's honour and glory ; and would be glad, therefore, to find, in the iron chariots of the Canaanites of the valley, a justification of their becoming faithless and faint-hearted, and so doing the work of the Lord deceitfully.

LXXIII.

JUDGES RAISED UP TO ISRAEL.

JUDGES II. 14—III. 4.

THE first part of the passage now to be considered contains not only an abstract or summary of what is recorded in the subsequent chapters of this book, as a history of God's dealings with Israel during a very important period, but a statement also of the principles on which these dealings proceeded. We find it there stated, that the judgment with which God visited the backsliding of Israel, when they forsook the Lord, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, was leaving them to be smitten and oppressed by the very people whose friendship they had courted and whose idols they had served. And this judgment is spoken of as a matter of course,—as the natural consequence of their backsliding,—as the judgment that was most befitting the wisdom, and best calculated to vindicate the rectitude of God. It had been threatened, indeed, in the same way, as the unavoidable and the bitter consequence of their forgetting and forsaking God; and it did bear witness at once to the wisdom and righteousness of God, while, with all its severity, it served also to illustrate his compassion and mercy. It was the judgment that was fitted most effectually to teach Israel the folly as well as the guilt of forming alliances with those whom they ought to have resisted, and of worshipping idols, which, instead of delivering them, were the immediate cause of misery and disaster. It served, moreover,

to bring out the guilt of their sin in all its aggravation, inasmuch as they must have been well aware, that if the heathen did to any extent gain a victory or obtain the mastery over them, it would encourage the nations to adhere to their infatuated opinion, that their gods were able to protect them against the God of Israel ; and thus the very judgment which divine justice required to be inflicted would prove an occasion for profaning the name of the Lord among the heathen. Against all these considerations Israel sinned ; and blind alike to the misery which they would entail upon themselves, and the dishonour which they would bring upon the cause of God, they forsook the Lord and served other gods, and might, therefore, have been left to reap all the fruits of their folly and rebellion.

But it is here announced, as another principle in God's dealings with Israel, that the judgments with which he visited them, overwhelming as they might appear to be, were inflicted, not for their ruin, but for their recovery ; for no sooner were they convinced of their guilt and infatuation, and cried unto the Lord for help,—nay, when their cry was nothing more than the groaning of men oppressed, and vexed, and greatly distressed because of the bitter bondage under which they were held, without any feeling of godly sorrow and contrition for their sin,—than God heard and delivered them ; and this not once or twice, but from time to time, even from one generation to another. Procedure like this was surely fitted, if any outward discipline ever was, to overwhelm even the impenitent with sorrow and self-abasement, so that they might remember, and be confounded, and never open their mouth any more because of their shame, when God was pacified towards them, for all that they had done. And we may believe that the goodness of God did lead many such to repentance. But we may also conclude, from the general tenor of Scripture, that such deliverances were mainly wrought in answer to the prayers and for the sake of the true Israel, the Church of God,—those who had been given in covenant to Christ to be redeemed, and on whose account, and for whose ingathering into his fold, it is that the present system of things has been, is, and will be upheld under a dispensation of forbearance and mercy. These deliverances, as well as the chastisements which rendered them necessary, were illustrations of the

principle in the economy of grace which God did more fully announce at a future period by the mouth of the Psalmist, "I will make him my first-born," that is, Christ, "higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

The attentive reader will have no difficulty in drawing from the subject of these remarks a great deal of instruction, as well as reproof and encouragement. But there is still much in the passage before us, as expounding the principles of God's dealings with Israel, which is fitted both to interest and to instruct. I proceed, therefore, to observe, that when God looked with pity on the sufferings of Israel under the hands of the spoilers who spoiled them; when it repented the Lord because of their groanings, by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them; and when he graciously purposed to visit and redeem them,—he carried his purpose into effect by the instrumentality of a single individual whom he raised up and endowed with the peculiar qualifications which the circumstances of Israel or the condition of their enemies rendered necessary in the man who was to deliver them. "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. . . . And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge." The proof of divine wisdom which this method of acting towards Israel affords can hardly require to be pointed out. It was the method best fitted to lead them to recognise the hand of God in their deliverance. Had they been enabled, by a combined effort among themselves, to cast off the yoke of their oppressors, and to assert their independence, they would have been ready enough to ascribe the success of their effort to the wisdom of their own counsel, and

the strength of their own arm ; and would thus have found, in the very deliverance which was wrought for them, new food for their pride, and nourishment for their spirit of rebellion against God. But when in the midst of hopeless depression,—when they were so crushed in spirit and broken in strength as to be incapable alike of forming and executing any plan for their own deliverance,—there appeared among them an individual possessed of courage, and skill, and strength, to commence, single-handed, a conflict with their oppressors, they could hardly fail to recognise in such an individual a divinely-commissioned leader who was to conduct them to victory ; and to this belief in the divine authority by which he acted, we may ascribe the readiness with which many of them obeyed his call, and took part in the conflict which was to terminate in their deliverance. The appearance of such a leader would remind them of what they had heard of Moses and of Joshua, and would awaken the hope that they were to see wrought on their own behalf such mighty works as these eminent men had wrought for their fathers.

But to the Church, the spiritual Israel, God's method of dealing with them, in raising up a judge to deliver them, was calculated to suggest a subject unspeakably more important than any temporal redemption which they or their fathers had ever experienced,—a subject which, even with the limited knowledge they had of it, must have been the most interesting of all subjects to them, as the foundation of their hopes and the source of their consolation. That subject was the great deliverance announced to our first parents in the precious declaration, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent,"—a deliverance of which the redemption of Israel from the temporal bondage to which they were so frequently subjected was but a type. No doubt, the deliverances which were wrought for Israel by Moses and Joshua, and the judges which succeeded them, were, to the true believers among them, tokens of the divine favour. But it was not by Moses, nor Joshua, nor the judges, that this favour was purchased or secured. They were only the means or the channels through which God conveyed to his people an intimation or assurance that they were the objects of his favour. How they came to be so was a different question ; and for the solution of this question, they looked to that great deliverance which had

been announced from the beginning, whereby the work of Satan, which had brought men under God's displeasure, was to be destroyed. However little the Church, the true Israel, at the time here referred to, might know of this great redemption,—how or when it was to be accomplished,—they must have looked to it, and to the certainty of its being wrought, as the ground of their hope or belief that God had received them into favour. And this much, at least, they must have understood concerning it,—that it was to be wrought out by one individual; for this was plainly intimated in the original promise, and very distinctly declared in subsequent revelations, in which that promise was renewed. When, therefore, they saw a succession of individuals, from Moses downwards, employed to rescue Israel from the bondage under which they were from time to time brought by the power of their enemies, who were the enemies of God also, they could not fail to be impressively reminded of the great redemption that was one day to be wrought by Him who had been foretold as the seed of the woman that was to bruise the serpent's head,—as "Shiloh," who was to come out of Judah, and to whom the gathering of the people should be,—as the Prophet like unto Moses, whom God was to raise up from the midst of them.

I do not say that the Church, at the time we speak of, saw in the deliverers thus raised up for Israel types of the great Deliverer; for they could not know so much of the person of Christ as to perceive such a resemblance. But they might, and I believe they did, see enough in the appointment of each of these individuals to remind them of the great promised Deliverer, and enough, moreover, to strengthen their faith and animate their hope in his appearing. They might, and I believe they did, see, in the victories which these individuals achieved, pledges of the great victory which was to be won by Him who was to arise out of Israel, and smite the corners of Moab, and was to have the dominion; nor is it competent for us to limit the consoling discoveries which might be made to them respecting the nature of that deliverance,—for it is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."

It thus appears, that in the course of his providence, as well

as by frequently renewed promises, God did continually present Christ to the view of the Church, and render the various events which befell his people the means of keeping alive their faith and hope in the great salvation. But there is another circumstance connected with the appointment of the judges who were successively raised up and commissioned to deliver Israel, which must have been designed, as it was calculated, to convey important instruction to the Church. It will be found, from a perusal of their history, that the work assigned to them required for its accomplishment that they should endure much toil and fatigue, and encounter manifold difficulties and dangers. This remark, indeed, is applicable, not only to the individuals whose history is recorded in the book before us, but to all the individuals, from Moses downwards, who were employed in rescuing Israel from the power and oppression of their enemies. And was there not a great deal in this circumstance that was calculated to familiarise the mind of the Church with the idea of a suffering Saviour? I do not mean by this remark that all the sufferings which the judges or other individuals endured, are to be considered as shadowing forth the sufferings of Him who was pre-eminently a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. They were sinful men, and their sinfulness, their special offences, might be the immediate procuring cause of some of the afflictions which overtook them. And in so far as this was the case, their sufferings did not foreshadow the sufferings of Christ. It was not, indeed, by their personal character that sinful men could ever be types of Christ at all, but from the office to which they were divinely appointed, or the work to which, by divine authority, they were specially called.

And neither is it necessary, therefore, that we should vindicate every one act which they performed, even in the execution of the commission with which they were intrusted. That commission did not secure them against infirmity, shortcoming, and sin; and they might sin in carrying it into effect, just as they were liable to sin in the discharge of any other duty. But the work to which they were appointed was in itself, and apart altogether from their personal character, a laborious work,—the place which they occupied was in its nature a post of danger; and it is on this ground that I have said the office of these deliverers was fitted to familiarise the mind of the Church with the idea of a

suffering Saviour. From Moses, down through the book before us, and, indeed, to the latest period in the history of the Old Testament times, every individual who wrought any great redemption for Israel did so at the expense of much personal exertion and great personal danger.

The idea of deliverance was thus intimately, I had almost said inseparably connected with the idea of difficulty and danger on the part of him that wrought it, in the mind of every thoughtful and devout Israelite who was familiar with the history of God's dispensations towards his Church; and when such a man looked forward to the great redemption, he might naturally anticipate that it, too, was to be the fruit of toil and sore travail. Nor did he want other intimations that so it was to be. The very first announcement of the great Deliverer foretold that he was to suffer, when it was said of him to the serpent, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." He was, moreover, predicted as a Prophet like unto Moses,—a man whose unceasing toil and whose meekness under it all was such that, as if to explain or account for it, we are told that "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." And then, in the ordinance of sacrifice, the humble and reflecting believer might see what was in perfect accordance with all these intimations of a suffering Deliverer, though there might be to him in that ordinance an awful mystery, which he was not able to unravel nor contemplate but with holy reverence and fear.

And that so much care should have been taken thus to make the Church familiar with the idea of deliverance being inseparably connected with suffering on the part of the Deliverer, will not appear wonderful when we reflect, that the idea of a suffering Messiah was the very stumbling-block which proved the ruin of the Jews when they rejected Christ, not knowing, in their blindness and infatuation, that when they crucified and slew the Lord of glory, they were fulfilling what was everywhere written in the Scriptures concerning him, and what, therefore, left their fearful guilt altogether without excuse. Their lamentable perversion of all that God had revealed did not affect his grace and goodness in doing so much to prepare them for the appearance of a Messiah, who, though a King, was to come to them meek and lowly, having no comeliness nor beauty which the

carnal eye could discern, or for which the carnal mind could desire him. Neither was their blindness any proof that believers of former times did not understand the many intimations which were given them of a suffering Saviour, or did not find in these intimations much that was fitted to minister to their consolation; for who can tell what views might be opened up to them of the work and character of the promised Deliverer, who was everywhere and in every way foretold, in the Word, and in the ordinances of God, as a sufferer,—or how far they might anticipate in him one who could meekly endure, as Moses himself never endured,—an High Priest who could be touched, as Aaron never was, with the feeling of his people's infirmities,—who could "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way?"

If such, then, was the instruction which the Church was to derive from the successive deliverances that were wrought for Israel by the judges whom God from time to time raised up, we have here a striking example of the wisdom and power of God, bringing good out of evil,—making the very wrath of man to praise him, and restraining the remainder of his wrath. It was the revolt of Israel,—their forsaking God, and serving the false gods of the nations,—that brought them into subjection to these nations, and gave occasion to all those deliverances whereby God unfolded so much of the character and work of Him who is the main subject of all that is written in the law of Moses, as well as in the prophets, and in the Psalms.

It is true, indeed, that provision was made for all this in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, when he purposed that he would not drive out the nations hastily, nor deliver them all into the hand of Joshua. What the result of this purpose would be was perfectly foreseen by Him who knoweth the end from the beginning,—and was, in fact, plainly foretold by Moses, when he said to Israel, in the way of warning, "I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands."

But, though this result was known to God, and was foretold by Moses as a matter of certainty, Israel could not allege that

some of the nations of Canaan had been left unexpelled at the death of Joshua designedly to ensnare them, and unavoidably to draw them into idolatry. On the contrary, the divine procedure in this matter was marked by great kindness towards them, and, but for their perverseness, was fitted to afford them a continued proof of the divine presence with them, and new manifestations of the divine power on their behalf.

The first intimation of God's purpose regarding the nations of Canaan, and which we find recorded as far back as the twenty-third chapter of Exodus, was in these words, "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land." This intimation, which we find repeated in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy, was surely any thing but laying a snare for Israel in which they were unavoidably to be taken. And so with another reason here given for these nations being left, namely, that God might prove Israel, whether they would keep the way of the Lord to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. "Therefore," it is added, "the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua."

This reason does, no doubt, imply that Israel were to be exposed to danger; for there must always be the danger of being overcome where there is trial or temptation. But there was no trial and no danger but what their fathers had encountered and triumphed over, and for meeting which they were not as amply provided as their fathers had been; for it is to be remembered that they had received promises of divine aid as large, and assurances of a final victory as unqualified, as any that had ever been given to the generation that preceded them. "Behold," said Joshua, "I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the Lord your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised unto you. . . . One man of you shall chase a thousand:

for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you."

If Israel, then, had acted on the strength of these promises, and proceeded, in obedience to the divine command, to execute the commission which they had received, they would have achieved just such a series of victories as their fathers under Joshua had won, and exhibited similar proofs of the sovereignty of the God of Israel as the only living and true God. If these nations had been left for this among other reasons, as it is here stated, "that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof," it would have been only that they might share in those triumphs whereby God manifested his favour for Israel, and asserted his supremacy over Canaan and her gods. It was not till they had forsaken him to serve Baal and Ashtaroth, that he said, "I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died;" and it was only when they were shorn of their strength, by unbelief and disobedience, that the remaining nations became "snares and traps" unto them, and were felt to be pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, to vex them in the land wherein they dwelt, "as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them." All this, as we have seen, was overruled for very gracious purposes,—even for unfolding to the Church new discoveries of that great Deliverer on whom from the beginning she had been taught to place her faith and hope. But this neither excused nor palliated the guilt of Israel, who did all that they could to expose the cause of God to reproach, and to give occasion to his great name being profaned among the heathen.

Believers may learn much from the view which is here given of the character of Israel on the one hand, and the divine dealings with that people on the other. They can hardly fail, indeed, on perusing these verses, to make a practical application of the subject to themselves; for they can hardly avoid being thereby reminded of their condition, their privileges, their dangers, and their responsibilities. They, like Israel, have been taken into covenant with God, having experienced a deliverance compared with which the redemption from the bondage of Egypt, and future deliverances from the oppression of the Canaanites, as

experienced by Israel, were but shadowy representations. When their eyes were opened, and they were turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, they received the forgiveness of sin, and a right to inheritance among them that are sanctified. They were delivered from the condemnation of the law, which had bound them over to the endurance of its threatened penalty,—even death,—that death which is the wages of sin,—the extinction in the soul not only of happiness, but of the capacity of enjoying it. And not only were they brought from under condemnation, acquitted of guilt, and accepted as righteous in his sight; but they were adopted into his family, and invested with the privileges of his children,—enjoying a sense of his favour,—drawing near to him with confidence as to a father,—pouring out their hearts before him when full either of joy or of sorrow,—making known all their wants by prayer and supplication,—and reckoning with confidence on his hearing, and granting, if he sees fit, the request of their lips.

But besides this deliverance from the bondage of guilty fear, they were delivered also from the bondage of corruption to this extent, that sin had no longer absolute dominion over them, as it had before. The enmity of their carnal mind against God was slain,—there was restored to them the capacity of, in some measure, enjoying fellowship with God,—and grace was promised to them to enlarge this capacity from day to day, till they should be entirely conformed to the image of the Son of God. Their condition is thus as different from what it once was, as the condition of Israel on entering Canaan was from their condition in Egypt.

But believers are not put at once in possession of all the blessedness which belongs to the new state into which they have been brought. They are not removed, immediately and for ever, beyond the reach of those unholy influences by which they were at one time enslaved. Their sanctification is, for most wise and gracious purposes, a progressive work, not an instant act of God's grace,—room being thus given for the exercise of all those principles of their renewed nature, in the strength and perfection of which their true happiness consists. They are thus in somewhat the same condition with Israel in Canaan. They have got footing, indeed, upon a new territory,—for they have been translated

out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light; but they are not beyond the field in which these kingdoms have been maintaining a conflict from the beginning. Enemies are still left, not designedly to ensnare, but certainly to try them; for it is by the trial of their faith, their love, their patience, their zeal for God's glory, and their regard for the honour of the Redeemer, that they are to show forth his praises here, and be fully prepared for the enjoyment of his kingdom hereafter.

But these enemies may become snares to them. If they grow weary of the watchfulness and attitude of defence which they must ever maintain against their enemies generally,—or if they are tempted to relax their exertions in contending with any one sinful inclination from within, or any sinful allurements from without which may address itself to that inclination, and flatter themselves that they may safely yield somewhat to a favourite gratification, without any hazard of being overcome and taken captive by it,—then they are on the very verge of a fall; and though grace may interpose to prevent it, they have no warrant in such a state of mind to expect it. If once they yield to an unholy influence, whether from within or from without, they are less able to resist that influence when they are again exposed to it,—not merely because a sinful principle gathers strength by indulgence, as it does in every unregenerate man, but because, in the case of regenerate men or believers, they deliberately throw away a portion of their strength, even the grace which was given them to carry on the conflict, and which they cannot expect to be restored so long as they are unwilling to employ it for the purpose for which it was given.

At this point, then, believers are obviously in a very perilous state; and but for a special interposition of divine grace, they will, sooner or later, fall into sin,—I mean, sin so open, and so inconsistent with their profession, as will bring reproach on that profession, and give reason to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Believers now are, in a certain sense, responsible, as Israel of old were, for the honour of that cause to which they stand pledged before the world as the cause of truth and of God, and they may be chargeable, therefore, with the sin of which Israel were guilty; for they may, by their inconsistency, afford ground to the world to speak of that cause reproachfully. All

backsliding, however, on the part of believers, does not lead to open inconsistency. God often delivers their feet from falling, even when they have left the right way, and brings them back to the paths of righteousness for his own name's sake. But though their backsliding may not bring discredit on their profession before men, it will fill them with sorrow, and cover them with shame and confusion in the sight of God; and the sins to which they have yielded, the spiritual enemies which have gained an advantage of them, having, through their own unwatchfulness, become snares and traps to them, will also for a season prove to be pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides, vexing them in the land wherein they dwell.

LXXIV.

GIDEON'S VICTORY AND PURSUIT.

JUDGES VIII. 4.

WE are told at the beginning of the preceding chapter, that Gideon was about to engage in battle with the army of the Midianites. It was a period in his history at which his faith was severely tried, but at which, also, as the passage before us intimates, it did signally triumph. His own army, originally amounting to two and thirty thousand men, had, by two successive trials of divine appointment, been reduced to three hundred ; while of the Midianites, we are told that they "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude," their camels being without number, "as the sand by the sea-side for multitude." Gideon, however, had been prepared by a course of very gracious training for meeting this trial ; and utterly hopeless, therefore, as the enterprise to which he was called might have appeared to others, as it would a short time before have appeared to himself, he stood undismayed at the prospect of the unequal conflict, having received not only multiplied proofs of his being divinely commissioned to undertake the enterprise in which he was engaged, but the plain and explicit assurance also, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand." And having thus cast himself on the simple promise of God, in opposition to all that sense and reason would have dictated, he quickly experienced a new proof of the divine goodness and condescension, fitted not only to confirm his faith

in the special promise which he had himself received, but to demonstrate the divine faithfulness in the promises made to Israel in the days of Moses. "It came to pass," we are told, "the same night, that the Lord said unto Gideon, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host."

Gideon and Phurah went down, accordingly, in the darkness of the night, and came "unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host," where they heard what must not only have strengthened their hearts, but filled them with admiration of the power and sovereignty of God. They overheard a man telling a dream unto his fellow, saying, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow," we are told, "answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." Thus one of the very enemies against whom Gideon had received a commission was made the bearer of a divine message to him, renewing the assurance of a complete and decisive victory; and that his hands, as it had been promised him, were thereby mightily strengthened, was emphatically acknowledged by himself, when, on hearing the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, "he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."

But it was not merely encouragement and confidence for his present need that the remarkable event here recorded was designed to impart to Gideon. It was an answer to the question which he had put to the angel of the Lord, when he said to him, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?" and such an answer as might have filled him with humility as well as admiration, inasmuch as it furnished an overwhelming

proof, in opposition to all his distrust and unbelief, that the Lord was the faithful and covenant-keeping God, notwithstanding all the folly and rebellion wherewith Israel had provoked him to anger. The converse which Gideon overheard between the two Midianite soldiers, and which went so powerfully to strengthen his hands and encourage his heart, might have reminded him of the similar assurance which was conveyed to Joshua by Rahab, when she said unto the spies, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." And while he contemplated in both the operation of the same power and sovereignty, he would trace both to the faithfulness of the promise originally conveyed through Moses, "I will put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee."

The faithfulness of this promise had been abundantly manifested in the experience of Israel in the conquest of Canaan, and in all the victories which had been subsequently achieved; and during the time of Joshua, and of the elders who outlived Joshua, Israel esteemed it not only their duty, but their honour and their glory, to acknowledge that "they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them;" but God's right hand, and his arm, and the light of his countenance, because he had a favour unto them. They ceased, indeed, thus to acknowledge God, and, therefore, he ceased for a time to lay the fear of them and the dread of them on the nations that were round about them; and so their enemies prevailed against them. But when they began to return to him in penitence and faith, he began to put into operation that mighty power, that unseen agency, whereby the enemies of Israel had been so frequently smitten with terror and dismay.

And he did so in a way graciously adapted to the weakness of their reviving faith,—making his interposition so palpable as to give them the most unequivocal assurance that it was his right hand and his arm that saved them. When he said to Gideon, "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me," he declared that it

was for the vindication of his own sovereignty that he forbade Gideon to take any thing like a mighty army into the field of battle. But it was obviously in great kindness and condescension to every true penitent in Israel, that he limited the followers of Gideon to three hundred men; for in so doing, he gave to every such individual what was infinitely better than the mere deliverance itself,—the animating assurance of his returning favour.

And the manner in which the victory was won was in accordance with the same gracious design. Gideon, we are told, “divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps,” or torches, “within the pitchers.” And they “came unto the outside of the camp, in the beginning of the middle watch; . . . and the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal; and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. . . . And the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host.” The result was, as we learn from the chapter before us, that of the hundred and five and thirty thousand fighting men that constituted the host of Midian, few if any escaped; and “thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more.”

And here was another answer to Gideon’s former question, “Where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?” for even the taking of Jericho itself, that first and great conquest which Joshua achieved on entering Canaan,—the pledge of all his future conquest,—did not more unequivocally demonstrate the sovereignty of God, and the immediate operation of his hand, than did the victory which Gideon had just won, and which he is here represented as following up. And what joy and gratitude would such a victory, achieved in such a way, diffuse through the Church,—the true Israel,—those who had been mourning, not only the oppression of their country by a merciless enemy, but the declension and apostacy which led to it,—while they were ready, like Gideon, to surrender themselves to despondency, and say, “Where be all his miracles which our

fathers told us of?" To all such it would prove a season of revival and refreshing,—an assurance that God had not cast off and utterly forsaken his inheritance,—that the arm of the Lord had again put on strength as in the ancient days, in the generations of old, and had been made bare in the sight of the heathen on behalf of his people,—that he had "regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry,"—and "remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies."

The overthrow of the Midian host by Gideon is repeatedly referred to in subsequent parts of Scripture. The Psalmist, in the eighty-third Psalm, prays or predicts concerning the enemies of Israel in his day,—those who had taken crafty counsel against God's people, and consulted against his hidden ones, saying, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance;"—of such the Psalmist prays that God would "do unto them as unto the Midianites,"—that he would "make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb; yea, all their princes as Zebah and as Zalmunna; who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession." And, in the prophecies of Isaiah, it was foretold of the king of Assyria, that when he had executed the commission which God had given him, to chastise his people because of their sin, but which the Assyrian executed for his own ambitious and ungodly purposes, saying, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent,"—the Lord of hosts should "stir up a scourge for him, according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb:"—a prediction which was soon after fulfilled, when "the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand."

These references or allusions show what an important place Gideon's victory over the Midianites occupied among the many deliverances which God wrought for his Church in the old time. But there is another reference to the same event also in the prophecies of Isaiah, where the work and conquests of Messiah are compared to it, evidently on the ground that as Gideon's victory was altogether a work of divine power, it was a fitting type or representation of the great victory which Messiah was to

achieve on behalf of his people, when the captives of the mighty were to be taken away, and the prey of the terrible should be delivered. "Thou hast broken," says the prophet, "the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever."

Such was the glorious person who was one day to achieve a mighty conquest for the deliverance of his captive and oppressed people, similar to that which was won over Midian on behalf of Israel; and in so far as the prediction referred to Christ's victory over the great enemy of man,—the adversary of truth and righteousness,—when he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross, the resemblance of that victory to the type by which it was here prefigured is abundantly evident, being altogether a work of divine power, as the overthrow of the host of Midian was. But in the victory here recorded, and in the manner in which it was achieved, we have a type or representation also of the work of conquest which Christ, as king on the holy hill of Sion, continues to carry on for the extension and establishment of his kingdom.

That kingdom, like Israel of old, is exposed to the assaults of many enemies, to whom the sovereignty of Christ is as offensive as was the sovereignty of the God of Israel to the idolatrous nations in and around Canaan; and the hostility of these enemies will always be virulent, in proportion as the subjects of Christ's kingdom are faithful to their Sovereign, and zealous in advancing his cause. Should they at any time prove otherwise,—should their love wax cold, and their zeal decay, and their character manifest more of conformity to the world than of resemblance to Christ,—the hostility of their enemies may appear to be disarmed, and, outwardly, they may seem to be in the undisturbed enjoyment of all the privileges which Christ has procured

for and bestowed upon his people. But they have in such cases only purchased worldly peace at the expense of spiritual blessings,—the real privileges of the subjects of Christ's kingdom,—and have brought themselves under a bondage which is not less real, and which, if they are again quickened to spiritual life, they will feel to be more bitter than that to which Israel were reduced by Midian of old.

A nominal Christianity, which is satisfied with a bare assent to certain doctrines, and exacts only the observance of certain forms, while it leaves the heart and the affections undisturbed in a state of ungodliness and alienation from all that is holy;—such a system of Christianity may be tolerated by an ungodly world,—the world of unregenerate men,—nay, it may even be patronised, and encouraged, and zealously propagated; inasmuch as, while it meddles not with the desires and gratifications of an unsanctified heart, it provides, in its outward forms, and occasional sacrifices of some worldly comforts, for quieting the fears with which the unsanctified conscience will sometimes be disturbed. But vital, living Christianity, in which love to Christ becomes the great actuating principle, subordinating to itself all other principles and motives of action, giving to the man a holiness and spirituality of character which assimilates him to Christ, quickening him to desire and labour that all around him may become devout, praying, and God-fearing men, and calling forth such a manifestation of the power and practice of godliness as will be constantly reproving the ungodliness of worldly men, and forcing upon them at times the unwelcome suspicion that if such a man only is right and safe, they must be wrong and in danger;—Christianity like this never has been, and never will be tolerated by the world of unbelieving men; and if they cannot succeed in corrupting it, so as to divest it of what disturbs and offends them, it will be discountenanced and discouraged, and, when time and circumstances permit, it will be literally persecuted.

And so, accordingly, in all ages, spiritual religion has had to contend with an ungodly combination, and a very formidable combination, having on its side a vast majority in point of numbers, and generally wielding, moreover, all the power of worldly wealth, and influence, and authority. And when we

reflect that this power has uniformly been exercised in opposing vital Christianity, alternately seeking by open violence to put it down, and, when that failed, labouring to reduce it to a system of mere forms, how profound should be our admiration of that unceasing watchfulness with which Christ has cared for his Church, and of that unseen power which he has exercised on her behalf! Were the operation of that power made palpable to our senses, how often should we have seen events as marvellous as that which is here recorded,—the plans which ungodly men have framed against the Church of Christ defeated,—their wisest counsels turned into foolishness,—their rage restrained, and their strength withered, without any visible check or opposition from without,—and themselves made the blind and unconscious instruments of not only marring their own best laid schemes, but of promoting the very cause which they thought to overthrow! The history of the Church furnishes many examples of deliverances wrought on her behalf, and of events apparently disastrous turning out for the furtherance of the Gospel, which can only be ascribed to the almighty agency of Him who destroyeth the wisdom of the wise, and bringeth to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

But it is not on special occasions only that this agency is in operation. It is as constantly at work as is the opposition of an ungodly world, the enemies of his Church, who are still addressed as the Psalmist addressed them in his time: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

But while the preservation, as well as the advancement of Christ's cause in the world, is absolutely dependent on the necessary exercise of his own sovereign power as king in Zion, that power is put forth through the instrumentality of human agency; and this being Christ's own ordination, we are not warranted to look for manifestations of his power for the

advancement of his cause, while we are neglecting to do the part assigned to us for the furtherance of that cause. Our agency is, in itself, utterly impotent either for subduing the enmity of sinners themselves, or for resisting the power of him who has led them captive at his pleasure; and Christ might have dispensed with such agency if so it had seemed meet to him. But he has, in marvellous grace, and condescension, and kindness to his people, determined otherwise; and, in virtue of this determination, human agency is necessary in the mighty work of delivering men out of the kingdom of darkness, and translating them into the kingdom of light.

In what sense human co-operation is necessary, and what is the place which it occupies in this great work, we find very intelligibly illustrated in the history before us. Gideon could have had no power even with his two and thirty thousand men, far less with his three hundred, to overthrow, or even to alarm the mighty host of the Midianites: and how much more was it beyond his power to smite them with such blindness, infatuation, and terror, that they actually turned every man his sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host! But the Lord had said to Gideon, "Thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites;" and again, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man;" and again, "By the three hundred men ... will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand." Though it had been easy, therefore, to God to throw the Midianites into dismay, and make them the instruments of their own destruction without the intervention of any human power,—as when, at a future period, the angel smote the army of Sennacherib,—Gideon's agency became necessary; and it was only when he and his three hundred men "brake the pitchers," and "blew the trumpets," and cried, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," that the terrors of the Lord fell upon the Midianites, and the work of destruction began throughout the camp. And this necessity for Gideon's co-operation is farther manifested in the passage before us, where he is represented as following up, even in a state of exhaustion, the victory which would not otherwise have been complete; for it was by his hand that the retributive justice of God was to be executed on Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

And while the case of Gideon thus illustrates the necessity of human agency, and the place which it occupies in the advancement of Christ's cause in the world, his example may furnish an important practical lesson, and, it may be, salutary reproof. We can easily conceive with what feelings Gideon would proceed to execute the commission which he had received. In regard to himself and his three hundred men, he must have felt that but for the assurance of its being God's work in which he was about to engage, and his being called to that work, it had been utter folly, absolute madness, to have attempted any thing against such an overwhelming host as a hundred and five and thirty thousand fighting men. But he must have felt also a confidence as to the result of his enterprise, with which no amount of army on his side could have inspired him,—no, not though he had changed places with his adversaries in point of numbers. He must have felt that he was an instrument in the hand of God, possessing no power or efficiency in itself, but an instrument without which divine power would not, and, according to the divine ordination, could not be exercised; and, therefore, he must have also felt that when he put himself in the place, and acted the part which had been appointed him, that power would assuredly be forthcoming for the fulfilment to the uttermost of the purpose and promise of God. And having thus placed himself at the divine disposal, he was willing to remain there till the divine will concerning Israel should be accomplished,—he sought not to retire when his first danger was over, and the victory secured,—he was ready to persevere so long as God had work for him to do,—and we find him here, accordingly, “faint, yet pursuing.”

Now, such are the feelings with which all believers are required to engage in any work to which they may be called, that is, in which they have the means and opportunity of engaging, for advancing the cause of the Redeemer. They have not, it is true, an express promise, as Gideon had, that any given work in which they engage will be certainly followed by a given measure of success. But they are as expressly assured as he could be in regard to his work, that the use of scripturally appointed means is necessary for the advancement of Christ's kingdom,—that all his people are called to take part in the use of these

means according to their opportunities,—that he will make use of these, as the channels through which his divine power will go forth to subdue and bring down the people under him,—and that they are not to regulate their efforts by the visible success which follows them, but on the principle that so long as opportunities are afforded them of making these efforts, they are to regard it as an intimation that he has work for them to do.

These are simple truths, which all know, and all will be ready to admit. But in acting upon them, how prone are we, on the one hand, to confide in our own skill and energy, as if we possessed some efficient power whereby to advance the kingdom of God,—the progress of vital godliness in the world! And, on the other hand, how weak and wavering do we frequently find our faith to be in the promise of divine power to accompany our efforts, so that many of them may be made with hardly any expectation of their being followed by the results which we ought to look and long for! And how often have we been ready to faint and become discouraged in prosecuting any Christian scheme, because we did not see so soon or so largely as we could wish of the fruit of our labour,—the very fruit which we had hardly faith enough to hope for! We need greatly to bear in mind our own impotency, on the one hand, and, on the other, the almighty power of Him in whose work we engage; but bearing in mind, at the same time, that in his service our instrumentality may be connected with great results; for with the command to be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” we have the assurance that our labour is not in vain in the Lord, but that we shall reap abundantly if we faint not.

And the remarks which have now been offered, in reference to the part which we may be called on to take in the furtherance of Christian objects,—in the great warfare between truth and error, between light and darkness,—are equally applicable to the personal conflict in which we are engaged with the enemies of our salvation. These enemies are numerous, and they are powerful. In our own deceitful hearts, and in the temptations of the world, to which these hearts give but too ready access, there is enough to render our conflict very formidable, and to convince us of our need of other strength than our

own, if we are to gain the victory. But, whatever may be the estimate which we have formed of the power of these enemies, we know but little of the combination that is formed against us, if we have not taken into account other adversaries, by whose agency the corruption of our own sinful hearts and the allurements of a sinful world are incalculably strengthened. "For we wrestle not," says an apostle, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Do we remember this solemn truth as constantly, and do we ponder it as carefully, as we ought to do? Are we not prone to rest satisfied with a very indistinct apprehension of the reality of this mysterious and malignant agency, against which the Scriptures do so frequently and so solemnly warn us? In our conflict with sinful affections within, and with the temptations that assail us from without, do we not sometimes forget the more formidable agency of the unseen adversaries, to whose attacks we are also exposed? And will it not be found, in consequence of this, that we are often carrying on the warfare more in our own strength, and relying more on our own resolutions, than we should otherwise do? For what would be the effect of habitually bearing in mind against what powerful adversaries we are called to contend, but to shut us up to a simple reliance on the promised aid of Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and to render very precious to us the blessed truth, that the Holy Spirit himself has undertaken our sanctification, and that we are encouraged to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is only when we contemplate, in all its extent, the formidable strength of our spiritual adversaries, and, at the same time, the resources which have been provided for us in a divine power, that we will carry on the conflict at once with vigour and with confidence.

So the apostle teaches; for he tells us what ought to be, and what, therefore, if we are in a spiritually healthy state, will be the effect of seriously considering the spiritual adversaries with whom we have to wrestle, when, after enumerating these, he says, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that

ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." And he has elsewhere told us what confidence of victory they may cherish who are thus prepared vigorously to maintain the conflict, when he says, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

LXXV.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON.

JUDGES XVI. 30.

THE history of Samson may be considered in two points of view, —either as the history of an individual in his private capacity, in which his character and conduct are to be judged of as those of any other individual whose name is recorded in the Scriptures; or as the record of deeds which he performed in a public capacity, as occupying a place expressly assigned to him by the authority of God. In the first point of view, his history, like every other written by inspired men, is full of instruction,—and instruction, too, of very easy application. He is there brought before us as the child of godly parents, and, moreover, a child of promise, whose birth was foretold by immediate communication from heaven, and concerning whom it was commanded that he should be devoted to God from his infancy: “For,” said the angel who announced his birth, “the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.” We cannot doubt that, under the guardianship of parents who feared God, and who had received such a peculiar token of the divine favour, he would be told, as soon as he was capable of understanding it, of the obligation laid upon him by a special divine command to be separated to the service of God, and, in testimony of this, to observe all those rules which were prescribed to those who were under the vow of the Nazarite, whether temporary or perpetual. We may conclude, also, that they would be as anxious to imbue

his mind with the fear of God as they were to train him to an outward observance of the divine institutions,—and that their great concern would be, that he should really possess that purity of heart and life which was symbolically represented by the course of living prescribed to the Nazarite.

Of their fidelity and diligence in thus labouring to train their child in the fear of God, we have one plain intimation in their dealing with him, even after he had arrived at manhood, when they remonstrated against his taking a wife of the daughters of the Philistines,—evidently on the ground that in so doing they believed that he was acting in direct opposition to an express and frequently repeated commandment. Nor have we any reason to suppose that their instructions, and prayers, and example were altogether lost upon him. It would appear that, till a very short time before his death, he had scrupulously observed the rules prescribed to a Nazarite,—a proof, we may conclude, that he recognised the divine authority by which these rules had been imposed upon him; and he is mentioned by the apostle, in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as one of the illustrious individuals who exhibited an example of that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And yet, with all the advantages which he thus enjoyed in the instructions of godly parents, and in the special marks of the divine favour to himself, as well as to them, and notwithstanding all that is favourably recorded of him in Scripture, his history presents a melancholy example of the deceitfulness of sin in establishing its dominion in the heart, and even in darkening and perverting the understanding,—and much solemn warning and salutary instruction may be derived from tracing his progress in a course of folly and infatuation, till the fatal moment in which he surrendered his strength into the hands of his enemies, while, in the insensibility which sin had produced, “he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.”

But I would more especially direct attention to the history of Samson,—considered in his public or official character,—as one of those who were, from time to time, raised up to deliver Israel out of the hands of their enemies. Of these individuals, who were thus commissioned to assert the sovereignty of the God of

Israel, by bringing relief and enlargement to his people, no one was more distinctly called and set apart to that office than Samson was. Not only is it said of him, after his death, that he judged Israel twenty years, but it was foretold of him, before his birth, that he should "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." None, therefore, of all the judges that preceded him, ever had a clearer or a more direct call to that office than Samson had; and of none of them is it more frequently said, that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." He was distinguished, moreover, from the other judges who had gone before him in this, that whatever he was instrumental in doing towards the relief or the deliverance of his country was done by his own individual strength and prowess. Of those who had previously judged Israel, not a few, indeed we may say all, had manifested great personal courage, and had willingly subjected themselves to great personal danger, as well as much toil and sore travail. But all of them had, more or less, the aid of others,—a band of faithful men, almost or altogether as daring and as devoted as themselves; and though they especially incurred the risk and the responsibility of every enterprise in which they engaged, so that it might be said of all of them that *they* delivered Israel, yet all of them did, to a certain extent, share the trial and the triumph with others whom God inspired with courage to assert his sovereignty, so that they, too, willingly "jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."

But it was very different with Samson. Whatever he was called to do, whether by immediate revelation from God or by the leadings of God's providence, was done by himself alone,—by his own personal strength and courage. When he came with his father and his mother to the vineyards of Timnath, and a young lion roared against him, "the Spirit of the Lord," we are told, "came mightily upon him, and he rent" the lion, "as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand;" and so entirely was this his own doing,—so little did he look for or receive any human aid,—that his father and his mother did not so much as know what he had done. So it was in every encounter which he had with the Philistines. So far from ever finding any support or assistance from his countrymen in shaking

off the oppressive yoke of the enemy, into whose hand they had been delivered because of their sins, the only occasion on which they are spoken of in connection with Samson is when, in their unbelief and faintheartedness, they took him and delivered him bound into the hands of the Philistines, in order to avert the displeasure and propitiate the favour of their haughty oppressors. It was by his own personal strength that he was enabled on that occasion to make his escape out of the hands of his enemies, for "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jaw-bone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith." So it was in every instance in which he came into conflict with the enemies of Israel. It was a conflict in which he stood alone, and in the success of which none of his brethren could claim any share; and even at the last, when his own sin had placed him a helpless captive in the hand of his enemies, and when they brought him forth to make merry over his fallen greatness, it was by the gracious restoration of the strength which he had forfeited and lost that he executed the heaviest of all the judgments which he had been commissioned to inflict on the enemies of Israel: for it was when he bowed himself with might that the house fell upon the lords of the Philistines, and upon all the people that were therein; "so that the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

There were none, then, of the judges of Israel who were more unequivocally called to that office by divine authority than Samson was, nor any in whose instrumentality a divine agency was more clearly manifested. If, therefore, the judges generally, in virtue of their office, and of the service to which they were called, are to be regarded as types of Christ, as shadowing forth the work of Him who "was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil," we are naturally led to conclude that Samson must have been eminently designed to be so. When we speak, however, of Samson, or of any other individual, as typifying or foreshadowing Christ, it is never to be forgotten that we speak not of the moral character and conduct of that individual. In this respect, no man, not even the holiest and the best, could ever have fur-

nished a type of Him who is "the holy One of God,"—"who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,"—who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." That moral character, indeed, was not essential to constitute a type is evident from the fact, that the most striking representations of Christ to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures, and which are recognised as such in the New Testament, were objects to which nothing of a moral nature could attach,—as, for example, the passover lamb, the lamb sacrificed daily, morning and evening, or the goats presented before the Lord on the great day of atonement, the one to be offered up in sacrifice as the Lord's goat, and the other to be sent away as the scape-goat into the wilderness, bearing on it the sins of the children of Israel. When we say, therefore, that individuals did in any way typify or represent Christ, it is not meant that they did so in their personal character as private individuals, but in their public or official character, and in reference to some special service to which they were expressly called by the authority of God. Nothing, therefore, which is sinful or unholy in their conduct can belong to their typical character. Even in regard to the sufferings which they might endure in the discharge of the public or official duty to which they were called,—though in these sufferings themselves they might foreshadow what Christ was to endure,—yet the immediate cause of their suffering might be the very opposite of that which subjected him to what he suffered, inasmuch as even the best of men, while persecuted for righteousness' sake, may have aggravated the bitterness of that persecution by some sin or indiscretion of their own.

And of this we have a striking example in the case of Samson. Though it was no doubt as a judge and deliverer of Israel that he drew upon himself personally and especially the hostility of the Philistines, as they did themselves acknowledge when they said, "Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us," yet it was by his own sin and folly that he fell into their hands, and was subjected to torture and to death. In regard, then, to the immediate cause of Samson's sufferings, so far from there being any thing typical of Christ, there is a striking contrast to the procuring cause of what He endured at the hand of men. Yet

this very contrast can hardly fail to remind us of Him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. When even the best of men suffer, they can find enough in their own sinfulness to explain why it is that they so suffer. And sin, too, was the procuring cause of all the pain and agony, and even the death itself, to which the Saviour was subjected. But it was the sin of others,—it was the guilt of those whom he had undertaken to redeem,—even the very sin of some by whom he was crucified and slain. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

But the ground on which we would represent Samson, and others who like him were divinely appointed to judge and to deliver Israel, as typifying or foretelling Christ, is the great truth which their appointment and the nature of the service to which they were called were obviously designed to inculcate. A succession of such men plainly intimated that if Israel were to be delivered from the consequences of the sins on account of which God had sold them into the hands of their enemies, it could only be with much difficulty, and toil, and danger, perhaps even death itself, on the part of him who was appointed to deliver them. And thus the Church, through a long succession of ages, was led to associate her deliverance from the misery which her backsliding had brought upon her, with the generous devotedness of himself to toil and danger on the part of her deliverer. She was, or she might have been, in this way familiar with the idea of a suffering Saviour,—an idea than which nothing could be more important to prepare her for the manifestation of the Son of God “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and in “the form of a servant,” humbling himself, and becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It is true, the generation to which Christ was manifested showed but too clearly how little they were prepared for the appearance of Messiah in so lowly a condition. But their degeneracy and their perversion of the Scriptures showed also how needful it was that the Church herself, the remnant according to the election of grace, should have presented to her plain and frequent

intimations of what she was to expect in the person and character of Him by the promise of whose coming her faith and hope were kept alive.

And such intimations were accordingly given, and in a great variety of ways, even from the beginning. The first promise itself did very emphatically announce, that He who was to bruise the serpent's head should himself be a sufferer; and among many other intimations of the same truth, both in typical ordinances and express predictions, it is set forth in the history of those who were from time to time raised up for the protection or deliverance of the people of God. And who can tell to what extent the devout and the thoughtful among that people saw foreshadowed, in the achievements of their judges and deliverers, the mighty work of Him to whose coming they looked forward with earnest and longing expectation? The history of the distinguished men recorded in this very Book of Judges, and of what they dared and did for vindicating the sovereignty of the God of Israel,—delivering the Israelites themselves from the bitter consequences of their transgressions,—and reviving the true religion after a season of apostacy or backsliding,—could not fail to furnish to believers under the Old Testament dispensation, as it still does to believers under the New, much matter for deep and interesting reflection; and while they dwelt with admiration and gratitude on the gracious interposition whereby God did from time to time raise up judges, by whom he delivered his people out of the hands of their enemies, they could not fail to remark that one thing was common to all these judges, namely, that they were all required to undertake enterprises, in which they not only underwent toil and hardship, but also jeopardized their lives. They were thus taught that the evils which sin produced were not to be remedied without suffering, it might be even to death itself. What was said of Gideon by his son, that he had “adventured his life far,”—or what Jephthah said of himself, “I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon,”—might have been said of all the judges by whose hand God wrought salvation for Israel.

But this is especially true, and was most strikingly exemplified, in the case of Samson. In so far as the events of his public or official life are recorded, they are a series of the most

perilous undertakings,—such as, humanly speaking, were utterly beyond the power of any individual to accomplish. They were not mere achievements of supernatural bodily strength. They exposed him to dangers against which no such strength could preserve him; for what was one unarmed man against a host, who had means of assailing him in various ways, against which no strength could avail him any thing? When, on one occasion, he slew a thousand of the Philistines, he could not have entered on such an unequal contest merely from the confidence which he placed in his own bodily strength, from having previously discovered what he was capable of effecting in that way. I am disposed to conclude, therefore, that in all his enterprises there was much room for the exercise of a strong faith,—that he did accordingly exercise faith, believing that a divine power would be forthcoming to sustain and give him the victory,—and that on this account his name has been enrolled in the list of witnesses who bore testimony to the power of faith, as recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. But however this may be, the service to which Samson was called, like that of his predecessors, was a service of toil and danger; and while this was throughout more palpable in his case than in that of any who had gone before him, so it was likewise in his latter end. He was the last of the judges, properly so called;—and, as if to bring out more fully in him than in any other the intimation of a suffering Messiah, he not only put his life in jeopardy, but actually laid it down for the deliverance of Israel; and whatever use Israel might make of his victory over their enemies, still it was a glorious victory,—the lords of the Philistines were cut off, and, in regard to numbers, “the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

In regarding Samson, then, as typifying or foreshadowing Christ, I do so on the ground that he was one of a class of persons whose official character and work were fitted, and, I think, designed, to render the mind of the Church familiar with the idea of a suffering Messiah. It is upon this general principle, and not on resemblances and coincidences on particular points which may be traced between the history of Samson and that of Christ, that I would rest the typical character of the former. Such resemblances may sometimes be fanciful; and it were rash

to assert that every thing which we find in the Old Testament Scriptures, wherein we can discover some similarity to the condition and circumstances of Christ during his abode on earth, was designed to typify him. I fear that on this subject there has been much loose interpretation, and much irreverent use of the Holy Scriptures. But, on the other hand, I am very far from acquiescing in the cold and cautious theory of those who tell us that we are not to see Christ anywhere in the Old Testament, except in those places where the New Testament says in express terms that he is to be found; for I believe, that if such a mode of interpreting Scripture were adopted, it would go near to starving many of God's children, by preventing them from finding the bread of life where they now find and feed upon it,—even in the Old Testament, where they discover Christ in many places in which that interpretation would forbid them to seek him.

I should say, therefore, in regard to certain points of resemblance in the history of distinguished persons in the Old Testament to that of our Lord, and which many godly men have regarded as designed to be typical, that while I would not venture to assert that it was the mind of the Spirit thereby to prefigure Christ, yet if to the devout mind they do naturally suggest him and his work, it is a most legitimate use of the Scriptures to take occasion from such passages to dwell in devout meditation on the person, and character, and work of Him who is to true believers all their salvation and all their desire. And such occasions of remembering and thinking of Christ, yea, and of feeding upon him, are suggested in the history of Samson. Being convinced, moreover, on other grounds already stated, that Samson was designed to typify Christ, and to foreshadow his work, and sufferings, and death, I can the more readily sympathise with the opinion of those who see, in many of the circumstances connected with the history of Samson, plain intimations of what was to be more fully unfolded in the person of Christ. The birth of Samson, for example, was remarkable,—perhaps miraculous; and the manner in which it was announced does very naturally, almost irresistibly remind us of the birth of the Saviour. It was foretold or enjoined concerning Samson that no razor should come on his head, “for

the child shall be a Nazarite unto God,"—a person separated to God, so as to be recognised by all as under a special obligation to be devoted to God's service; and he should "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Of Christ it was foretold that he should be called Jesus, because he should "save his people from their sins;" and that the Lord should give unto him the throne of his father David; and he should reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there should be no end. The first recorded act of Samson was his encountering and killing the lion that roared against him in the gardens of Timnath. Christ, in entering on his public ministry, encountered and vanquished the tempter,—the great enemy of truth and righteousness,—the adversary who, as a roaring lion, goeth about continually, seeking whom he may devour.

But it is especially in the death of Samson that we are reminded of Christ and of his death. Samson, in his state of supposed weakness, or rather utter helplessness, was brought forth to make sport to the Philistines, while they were making merry in the house of their god, giving him thanks for having delivered their enemy into their hand. "They set him," we are told, "between the pillars" whereon the house stood,—evidently in mockery, believing that now they had nothing to fear from the strength of which he had been shorn, but in which they had once seen him carry away the gates of their city, to their disappointment and dismay. And who that reads this can fail to remember how the Jews, as if delivered from the terror which the manifestation of the Saviour's divine power had laid upon them, scoffingly exclaimed, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." But, farther, the sovereignty and the honour of God were involved in the insults offered to Samson, inasmuch as the Philistines were glorying in what they thought the triumph of their god, Dagon, over the God of Israel. For the vindication, therefore, of his supremacy, he heard the prayer of his sinful, but then, I believe, penitent servant, and so imparted to him faith and strength, that when "he bowed himself with all his might," "the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein: so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they

which he slew in his life." And here, again, who can fail to remember the purpose and the manner of Christ's death? It was for the vindication of his Father's honour as the Lawgiver and the Judge, that he submitted to insult, and ignominy, and death; and when, in apparent weakness, and loaded with the taunts and reproaches of ungodly men, he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, he at that moment achieved a victory the most glorious, both in its nature and in its consequences, inasmuch as he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross.

This was indeed a glorious victory, whereby the captives of the mighty were taken away, and the prey of the terrible was delivered. It is a great and most precious truth, that Christ has redeemed his heritage from the hands of their enemies, and erected his kingdom on the ruins of the kingdom of darkness. But what will this avail us if our heart has not been conquered and brought within the domain of Christ's kingdom? The heart of every human being is by nature under the dominion of the wicked one, and must continue so till it is fought for within itself, and won, so as to be brought under the authority of its rightful Sovereign. Has this conflict taken place in regard to us? Has the great usurper been expelled from our hearts? And has Christ established his kingdom there, as the reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost? We should be able to answer this question: for if the battle has been fought,—if Christ has expelled the enemy whose slaves we once were,—and if he has subdued us to himself, and has made us willing in a day of his power, we must have been parties to the conflict. At first, perhaps, we may have taken part against our gracious deliverer, rejecting the proposals of his grace, and resisting the motions of his Spirit. But if he has redeemed us out of the enemy's hand, he must also have turned our own efforts against that enemy; and we ought to know, therefore, whether we have done so, and whether we are now really watching, and praying, and labouring, lest he should again acquire his usurped dominion over us.

The enemies of Israel, in the old time, were never more vigilant in looking for an opportunity, and never more prompt in embracing it, for the purpose of again bringing Israel under their yoke,

than our spiritual adversary is to recover the place which he has lost in our heart, and to bring us again into subjection to his authority. If we are not conscious to ourselves that we are engaged in such a conflict, I fear it must be because our great adversary is in the quiet and undisturbed possession of our hearts as a portion of his kingdom,—and that as we are not rebelling against him, so he is not disquieting us. Let us remember that never was Samson more really engaged in a conflict with the Philistines, than all true believers are with the devil, and the world, and the flesh,—and that their conflict, moreover, like his, can terminate only with death. But let them be assured, also, for their encouragement and consolation, that if they are faithful in the conflict, death will bring them the victory and the crown,—that the moment of their apparent weakness will be the moment also of their most decisive victory,—that even in dying they will triumph over adversaries with whom their conflict, even in their strongest and most vigorous days, was sometimes felt to be almost desperate,—and that in their final and complete victory, it may be said of them, as of Samson, that the dead which they slew in their death were more than they which they slew in their life.

LXXVI.

R U T H.

RUTH II. 12.

WE are told at the beginning of the first chapter, that the events recorded in this book took place "in the days when the judges ruled;" but under which of the judges it was that they occurred, we have no means of ascertaining with any certainty. Some, indeed, have supposed that it must have been in the time of Gideon, inasmuch as it is specially recorded of his time, that there was a famine, for "so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, . . . and destroyed the increase of the earth, . . . and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass; for they came up with their cattle, and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number:" so that it is said of Gideon himself, that when the angel appeared to him, he was threshing "wheat by the wine-press, to hide it from the Midianites;"—while it is said of the time referred to in this book, that "there was a famine in the land,"—evidently assigning this as the reason why Elimelech "went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons." But though we might thus naturally refer the events here recorded to the time of Gideon, rather than any other of the judges, seeing that it is not said of the time of any other that there was a famine in the land, yet we cannot certainly conclude that it was so. Though it is not expressly said, in regard to any other period in the time of the judges, that

Israel were visited with famine, we can hardly doubt that they were at times, and to a certain extent, overtaken with that calamity.

Of all the judgments with which they were threatened in the event of their forsaking the Lord and serving other gods, their being delivered into the hands of their enemies was represented, and must have been felt by them, as the most terrible; and the whole tenor of God's dealings with them warrants us therefore to conclude, that before proceeding in any instance to inflict this the severest of his chastisements, which he often did, he would give them intimations of his displeasure in the diminished fruitfulness of their land, and in the shortened duration of their life,—or, in other words, that he would to some extent visit them with famine and pestilence, before he gave them up to be spoiled and wasted by their enemies. We cannot, therefore, determine to what period the history before us belongs; nor is it necessary that we should. It is an episode or incidental story, complete in itself, and full of instruction which is no wise dependent on the time when the events here recorded took place; for while, in a narrative of inimitable simplicity and beauty, we have a faithful delineation of individual character, and a lively picture of the social manners of Israel, in a season of peace and prosperity, we have also a very striking manifestation of the sovereignty of God, overruling events by his providence for accomplishing the purposes of his grace,—and furnishing a new intimation of the extent of the promise given to Abraham, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

I have already had occasion to remark, that the famine which prevailed in the land of Israel is plainly assigned, in the first verse of the first chapter, as the reason why Elimelech went to sojourn in the land of Moab; and that it was so is farther evident from what is stated in the sixth verse, where it is said of his widow Naomi, that “she arose, . . . that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” There can be no doubt that this famine was sent as a judgment of God on one of the many occasions of their forsaking the Lord, and serving other gods; and that it was a very severe and long-continued judgment may be inferred, I think, from the

fact, that a man in Elimelech's circumstances should have felt or thought it necessary to leave his country, and take up his abode in the land of idolaters. It appears that he was a man of substance; for he had an inheritance or possession among his brethren of sufficient value to make the redemption of it by his next kinsman a matter of some importance. He had, moreover, two sons in whom he might hope that his name would be perpetuated in Israel, and that his inheritance would go down in his family to future generations. It farther appears that he stood related to other wealthy and distinguished families, inasmuch as his nearest kinsman declined redeeming his inheritance lest he should mar his own; and his next of kin was Boaz,—an individual of whom it is expressly said, that he was “a mighty man of wealth,” and who, as is evident from this history, was a person of great influence and consideration in Bethlehem and the neighbourhood. And though nothing is said regarding the religious character of Elimelech and his sons, yet we would naturally conclude, from what is recorded of Naomi, that Elimelech's was a family that feared the Lord, and called upon his name.

It must have been under no light pressure, then, that such a man came to the resolution of leaving his country and his inheritance, and becoming a sojourner in the land of Moab; and when he did so, it must have been with the prospect of being obliged, for a long time, if not permanently, to make his dwelling-place there. It may be that Elimelech was deficient in faith when he thus forsook his country instead of remaining there, and labouring by his influence and his example to bring his brethren to repentance, that so the Lord might turn from the fierceness of his anger, and visit his people again in mercy, giving them bread. And it may be also that his sons transgressed in taking them “wives of the women of Moab,”—thus permanently uniting themselves with a people who, at a former period, had drawn their fathers into great sin, and involved them in great suffering. But however this may be,—whether, and to what extent, Elimelech and his sons were blameworthy,—God was bringing good out of evil, and overruling their doings for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes.

And with regard to Elimelech's sons, it is not improbable that

the women of Moab whom they took to them for wives had forsaken their own gods, and worshipped the God of Israel in the house of their father-in-law. With regard to Ruth, indeed, I think that this is very evident. The passage under consideration shows that Boaz regarded her as a convert to the true religion,—as having made a profession of faith in the God of Israel as the only living and true God,—or, as Boaz emphatically expressed it, as having come to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel; and we have earlier intimations, in the preceding part of this book, that she had forsaken dumb idols to serve the living God. When Naomi remonstrated with her daughters-in-law against their proposal of accompanying her into the land of Israel, she said to them, “Go, return each to her mother’s house,”—as if intimating to them that they might, at a future period, repent of having left their mother for the sake of a mother-in-law. But when, on a second time remonstrating with them, Orpah, one of them, kissed her and returned, she addressed Ruth a third time, and in such terms as to put it to her whether she really was prepared to leave her country and her religion. She said to her, “Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.” And Ruth, I think, showed by her reply that she understood the appeal, and that she was required to say whether she believed the God of Israel to be the true God; for, while she declared that no consideration should ever induce her to leave her mother-in-law, and go back as Orpah had done, she did especially avow her readiness to leave her people and her former gods, for the people and the God of Naomi: “And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

Never, perhaps, were the feelings of a warmly attached heart expressed in more exquisitely touching language. But there was more in Ruth’s attachment than mere natural affection. It was sanctified affection. Dearly as she might have loved Naomi as her friend, and as nearly related to the lamented husband of

her affections, that love was incalculably strengthened as well as purified by having found in Naomi's God the true God and her God,—the God of all grace and consolation. She had been Naomi's companion under her manifold painful bereavements; and had herself participated in these bereavements; and she must have seen that the God whom Naomi feared had imparted to her, amidst her accumulated afflictions, strength, and support, and consolation, which her gods were utterly unable to minister to their blinded votaries. Naomi, it is true, might well be called a woman of a sorrowful spirit, greatly cast down under her successive and sore trials; for when, on her return to Bethlehem with Ruth, "all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?" we find her saying, "Call me not Naomi,"—that is, pleasant,—“call me, Mara,”—that is, bitter,—“for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?”

But there was nothing in all this inconsistent with a devout recognition of God's hand in all that had befallen her, and humble submission to God's will in all that had been appointed her. In fact, she did most explicitly acknowledge the hand of the Lord in her affliction, and was evidently looking to the same hand to heal the wounds which it had inflicted. Such resignation under heavy calamity, and such a cleaving with confidence to Him who had sent that calamity, must have appeared to Ruth altogether unaccountable, if the God whom Naomi feared was like the false gods of the Moabites; nor could she have unreservedly cast in her lot with her mother-in-law, unless she had attained to some right and worthy apprehensions of the character and moral government of the true God. And when, therefore, she declared to Naomi, "Thy God shall be my God," she fully verified the opinion which Boaz afterwards expressed concerning her, when he said, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Such, I think, is the view which we are warranted, or rather which we are required to take of the character of Ruth, as necessary fully to explain the strength of her attachment to

Naomi, and her readiness to leave her country, and her kindred, and her father's house, and to take up her abode in the land of strangers. And if such was her character,—if she was not only outwardly a proselyte to the Israelitish worship, but a real convert to the true religion,—then how marvellous in her eyes must have been the divine dealings with her! She was living contentedly, in so far as religion was concerned, among idolaters, herself an idolater: a family of strangers came to settle in her neighbourhood, driven thither by the pressure of a sore famine in their own land; of these strangers she probably knew little, and for them cared still less, or, if she did know any thing, it would only be that they belonged to a country which from an early period had been regarded as hostile to her own; with that family she formed a worldly relationship, which at first must have appeared a very unlikely one; and the result was that she was brought to the knowledge of the truth, and turned from the worship of idols to the service of the living God. Thus, by a combination of events over which she had no control, and of circumstances which, in so far as they depended on her, had, in all probability, no reference to her spiritual interests, the gracious purpose of God concerning her was carried into effect. By the example, and, we may well believe, by the instructions also, of Naomi, she had been taught submissively to acknowledge the hand of God in the afflictions which had come on her mother-in-law, and in which she herself had largely shared. And can we doubt, then, that one of the chief sources of her consolation would be, to trace the same hand arranging and directing all the occurrences which contributed to bring about her deliverance from heathen darkness, and her translation into the light and liberty of the people of God? Can we doubt that she would often look back with admiration and gratitude on the way by which God had led her,—emphatically a way that she knew not,—and that such a retrospect would serve greatly to strengthen her confidence in God, when she chose the covert of his wings as her only and secure hiding-place, in preference to all that her former people and her former gods could do for her?

And, in like manner, must it not be the frequent exercise of all true believers to look back on the way by which they have been led, and to trace, in the circumstances in which they have

been placed, and the condition into which they have been brought, the guidance of another hand than their own? "The works of the Lord," says the Psalmist, "are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." And, surely, in searching out these works, and making them the subject of devout meditation, believers cannot overlook those which have been wrought for themselves, and which are, therefore, specially fitted to awaken their admiration and gratitude. There are many, I believe, whose real conversion to God was brought about in a way as unexpected, and by means over which they had as little control, and cared as little about controlling, as was the case with Ruth when she was brought into contact with the family of Elimelech; many to whom the Gospel was brought from afar, or who were themselves, in the providence of God, carried to a great distance,—it may be, to the land of strangers,—to hear it from the lips of one of whom they had never heard or known, till the Gospel from his mouth came to them, "not in word only," as it might often have come before, "but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

But it is not only in such remarkable cases as these that believers may have much to remember, and dwell upon with gratitude, in those arrangements of God's providence whereby means were provided for first making them savingly acquainted with divine truth, as well as for cherishing and strengthening the divine life in their souls when it was implanted. They may remember, that after long enjoying the means of grace, in circumstances as favourable as could well be conceived for their becoming savingly acquainted with the truth, but without their having ever advanced a step beyond the condition of these formalists, having a name to live, but being still dead, they were at last brought under convictions, and persuaded to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel, by means equally unexpected and unlikely. And they may remember, too, that when exposed to adverse influences, whereby they were in danger of being overtaken in sin or thrown into error, seasonable restraints were laid upon them, or they were providentially brought into contact with those whose salutary influence counteracted that by which they were ready to be ensnared. Whatever, therefore, be the light, and strength of prin-

ciple, and spiritual peace and comfort, to which, through grace, they have now attained, they cannot surely forget, or cease to acknowledge with gratitude, the tenderness and care which were exercised towards them while yet their faith was weak and their Christian experience limited,—and how God graciously provided, not only for succouring them in temptation, but for teaching them as they were able to bear it. We can easily conceive how Ruth would look back on the time at which she began to emerge out of the darkness of heathen idolatry, and how, by the instructions and example of Naomi in her meek submission to the divine will, light gradually broke in upon her mind regarding the character and perfections of the God of Israel, till she was persuaded and enabled to choose him as her shield and her exceeding great reward. And must it not, in like manner, be a frequent and a favourite exercise with believers thus to revise the way by which the good Shepherd led them into and kept them in the right path,—comforting them when they were cast down and troubled,—refreshing them when they were weary,—and oftentimes delivering their eyes from tears, and their feet from falling?

The history of Ruth would thus be an interesting and instructive one, even if nothing more had been recorded of her than that she was turned “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;” for, even in that case, she would have furnished a memorable example of the sovereign grace, as well as of the overruling providence of Him “which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.” But, in the divine purposes concerning her, there was more, both in regard to herself and in reference to the Church, than merely that she should have a part and lot in the inheritance of the Lord. She had manifested strong faith in God, as well as a very warm affection for her mother-in-law, in leaving her country for a land of strangers. Her connection with the family of Elimelech had been a melancholy one; and she had heard Naomi ascribe all the calamities which had befallen her directly to the hand of the God whom she served. “It grieveth me much,” said she, in urging her daughters-in-law to return,—“it grieveth me much, for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.” Yet Ruth was not deterred by this view of God’s dealings, even

with them that feared him, from seeking her only shelter under the covert of his wings; and the worthy conceptions which she had thus obviously formed of the divine character, and the confidence which she placed in his power and faithfulness, were met by a special manifestation of the divine favour. The devout wish expressed by Boaz regarding her was fully realised,—“The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” Not only was a sure and peaceful dwelling-place provided for her in her adopted land, but, in being united to Boaz, she was at once raised to a place of honour and of eminence among the daughters of Israel.

But a higher honour still was awarded to her. Besides the prayer of Boaz on her behalf, which he was himself the means of fulfilling, there were others expressed for her which cannot, I think, be regarded otherwise than as prophetic, though it may be unconsciously so on the part of those who uttered them. I refer to the language of the elders of Bethlehem, whom Boaz had called to be witnesses that he had redeemed the inheritance of Elimelech. “The Lord,” said they, “make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.” This remarkable prayer was also fulfilled. Ruth, like Tamar, not only became a mother in Israel, but was brought into the line from which Messiah was to spring; thus forming a link in that chain which united the first promise of a Saviour with his appearing in Bethlehem,—the very place where Ruth, a stranger and a heathen, was adopted into the heritage of the Lord. Her name thus stands in the sacred page inseparably connected with the history of all that is most deeply interesting in God’s dealings towards a guilty world;—an honour which, had they known it, would have been regarded by every devout woman in Israel as the highest, the most distinguished that could have been conferred.

But though the fact that Messiah was to descend from Ruth was not known to the Church of that time, it is not, therefore, the less instructive, and ought not to be the less in-

teresting to the Church now. To say, in regard to that fact, that it was not then known, is only to say of this portion of Scripture what is true of many others, that it was written specially "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." The fact referred to furnishes a striking proof how constantly, though silently, God was carrying forward his gracious plan, even at those seasons when, amidst the tumult of national conflicts, or under the pressure of national calamities, there were few who thought of him and of his promises and plans at all, and when these few, it may be, were so broken and cast down in spirit as to be ready to say, "Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious?"

Amidst the general backsliding in Israel which brought upon them the judgment of famine, and during the disastrous consequences of that famine, the emigration of Elimelech to the land of Moab would be little thought of, if noticed at all, beyond the precincts of his native village; and even there, he might be almost or altogether forgotten by the end of the ten years which had elapsed before Naomi, the only survivor of his family, returned. And yet, of all the events of that period which occupied the attention of the people of Israel, awakening their fears, or exciting their hopes,—depressing them into despondency, or rousing them to active exertion,—the most important in the divine counsels, and for the accomplishment of the divine purpose of mercy to a lost world, was the removal of a single family from the land of Israel, and their temporary establishment in the country of Moab. By that event, unheeded or but lightly thought of amidst national plans and efforts, though an event which was one of the melancholy consequences of national sin, God was providing silently, but surely, for the fulfilment of the promise sworn to Abraham; and in recording that event, he has given to the Church, not only one proof among many that he is the faithful and the covenant-keeping God, but a sublime example also of his sovereignty in the manner of his executing his purposes, showing that from the beginning he hath "chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise;" and "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to

bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence."

But though the Israelites of Ruth's time did not and could not know how intimately connected her conversion to the true religion was with the coming of the promised Messiah, there was another great event of which her history gave intimation, and which they might, in some measure, have apprehended,—I mean, the future calling of the Gentiles into a participation in the privileges which Israel enjoyed in possessing a revelation of the divine will. The Israelites who knew any thing at all of that revelation could hardly be ignorant of the fact, that, in the promise made to their father Abraham, it was expressly declared, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed;" and they could hardly fail to be reminded of this promise, when they saw, as in the case of Ruth, a Gentile seeking and finding protection among them, under the sanction of the express commandment of God regarding their conduct towards strangers.

Israel, it is true, had received no commission directly to attempt converting the heathen nations to the true religion; and their history makes it but too evident that if they had attempted it, they would more likely have been turned to idols than idolaters would have been brought to the worship of the true God. But no obstacle was thrown in the way of such of the heathen as were inclined to seek after the Lord God of Israel. On the contrary, the Israelites were expressly and repeatedly enjoined to deal kindly by strangers, remembering that they themselves were strangers in the land of Egypt. And if they had been faithful to the commission which they received to execute God's judgments on the impenitent nations of Canaan, and steadfast in the covenant of their God, so that they would have enjoyed uninterrupted prosperity, and the fear of them and the dread of them would have been upon all the nations round about them,—how many, humanly speaking, out of these nations, might have been convinced that their idols were lying vanities which could not help them, and might have been led to inquire after the God of Israel, who, as they themselves witnessed, did constantly prosper his people, covering their head, and giving them the victory in the day of battle! We know that in the time of David and Solomon, when the kingdom of Israel was in its greatest pro-

sperity, the number of strangers in the land was upwards of an hundred and fifty thousand. But however limited and imperfect might be the knowledge of the Church, at the period here referred to, regarding the calling of the Gentiles, they could not but know that this calling was expressly mentioned in the promise made to Abraham; and that promise was very significantly renewed in the person of Ruth, when she was not only admitted to the privileges common to all Israel, but raised to honour and distinction, in being united to one whose condition, as it is here set forth, was obviously that of a true, right-hearted Israelite, of wealth and influence, enjoying, with outward prosperity and peace, the affectionate respect of his household, and the esteem of the community at large. And this intimation of the future calling of the Gentiles was one which became clearer and more explicit in every successive generation. The Church in David's time, while looking forward with longing expectation to the fulfilment of the glorious things which were spoken of his house and his throne, could not fail to remember that David himself was descended of Ruth the Moabitess, at no greater distance than the third generation. And the Church, at a later period, would be reminded, that to the same daughter of Moab Bethlehem owed its first distinction, when the prophet Micah thus foretold the birth of Messiah there: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Even to the Old Testament Church, then, the history of Ruth was fitted to furnish a very plain intimation that Messiah was not only "to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel," but to be "a light to the Gentiles," and "salvation unto the end of the earth." And to the Church now, that history stands a recorded pledge of the due fulfilment of all that has been foretold of the glory of the latter day. That fulfilment, as men are wont to reckon, has been long delayed; and by many, even of those who profess to believe the Bible, the promises regarding it are treated, it is to be feared, as if they were forgotten. By no small portion, indeed, of the professedly Christian world, they are forgotten; for amidst all the mental activity which is unceasingly spent in devising schemes of indi-

vidual or national aggrandisement, and amidst all the unwearied efforts that are made to carry these schemes into effect, how very small a portion of human skill and strength is directed to the one object of letting in upon the dark places of the earth the light of the blessed Gospel ! And with regard to the efforts which the few have been prompted to make for that object, how little, how insignificant, how contemptible, is the place which they occupy in the eyes of the many, the great mass, who are eagerly bent on their objects of mere secular interest ! But though men, even professedly Christian men, may, in the tumult of worldly competitions, forget or overlook the advancement of Christ's cause in the world, God has not forgotten, nor for one instant ceased to forward, the accomplishment of his own gracious purpose ; and as, in the old time, when his cause was in like manner forgotten or despised by the great body of his professing people, he was providing evidence for the vindication of his faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God in an exiled and forgotten family in the land of Moab ; so he will, by means it may be as unlikely, make it manifest that he has never been unmindful of his promises to the Church, and that while he "bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought," and "maketh the devices of the people of none effect," his counsel "standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

LXXVII.

THE SONG OF HANNAH.

1 SAMUEL II. 1-10.

THE circumstances which gave occasion to the song of praise of which these verses form a part were of a private and personal kind. Hannah, the individual by whom it was uttered, had earnestly besought the Lord that she might have a son, vowing, at the same time, that if her request were granted her, she would, so far as her authority and power went, and if her offering should be acceptable to God, dedicate her child, all the days of his life, to the special service of the Lord. Her prayer was heard; and when the Lord had given her her petition which she had asked of him, she called the child Samuel, that is, "asked of God," and in due time she brought the child and presented him to Eli the high priest, that he might be "lent," or returned to the Lord of whom she had obtained him by petition. And it was on this occasion that she gave utterance to her gratitude in the prayer or thanksgiving here recorded. As the immediate occasion of this thanksgiving was the manner of the divine dealing with herself personally, so the subject of it was the blessing which she had received,—the token of the divine favour which had been vouchsafed in the answer to her prayer. The value which she attached to that blessing is very evident, both from the passage before us and from what is recorded of her in the preceding chapter. Her childless condition had long been a cause of sorrow and trouble to her, as if sub-

jecting her to reproach ; and her vexation on this account had been greatly aggravated by a circumstance which, we find, did but too frequently disturb the peace even of godly families in Israel of old. “ Her adversary,” we are told, “ also provoked her sore, for to make her fret,” “ therefore she wept, and did not eat.”

Such a feeling on the part of Hannah may perhaps be regarded as a sinful dissatisfaction with the appointments of God’s providence. But to say nothing of the obscurity which, in the earlier period of the history of Israel, hung over the time and manner of the appearance of Messiah, and during which it might appear a possible thing to any one in Hannah’s circumstances that she might perhaps be the mother of the great Deliverer,—to say nothing of this idea, which, there is reason to believe, did prevail among the godly in Israel,—the nature of the blessings by which God had promised to distinguish his people might have led Hannah to fear that the condition which exposed her to the reproach of her adversary, was also an intimation that she was not in the possession of the divine favour ; and her prayer, therefore, might be the earnest longing of a soul in spiritual distress after the light of God’s gracious countenance,—a comforting sense of his forgiveness. And if such was her state of mind, it will sufficiently account for the depression to which she gave way, and for the earnest, persevering urgency with which she preferred her request ; and it would prepare us also to expect that when her petition was granted her, she would offer her acknowledgment in language of the warmest gratitude,—the language of one who had experienced a very gracious interposition, even a mighty deliverance from the enemies of her spiritual peace, by whom she had been tempted to fret and to despond. And that such was Hannah’s state of mind is plainly intimated, I think, in what she said concerning herself, as recorded in the preceding chapter, and in the verses before us. When she prayed that she might have a son, it was not that she might derive from the possession of that blessing the worldly satisfaction which parents are wont to look for and to enjoy in their children : for she was willing, nay, she bound herself by a solemn vow, to part with him even in his infancy, and place him, if God would accept the offering, where she could not have that daily and hourly intercourse with her child in which a mother usually finds her purest and highest

enjoyment: "She vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." Her great concern, then, was, that she might be instrumental in advancing the glory of God, and that, in being honoured to do so, she might have a token or pledge that she herself enjoyed the divine favour. And in accordance with all this is the language of her thanksgiving; for it plainly appears that spiritual and not mere temporal blessings were the subject of her song of gratitude and praise. "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation."

But though the occasion as well as the subject of Hannah's thanksgiving was thus of a personal and private nature,—and though her own deliverance from a condition which had not only subjected her to reproach, but had occasioned spiritual dejection, forms, as it were, the ground-work of her song of praise,—yet it is abundantly evident that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, she was carried far beyond mere personal considerations, and that there were opened up to her very enlarged and sublime views of the character of God, and of the principles on which he conducts his government in reference to the children of men. She could not, indeed, lose sight of the gracious interposition which she had herself experienced, and by which she had not only been vindicated from the reproach of men, but distinguished by a special mark of the divine favour,—made partaker of the honour that cometh from God, and which alone exalteth the creature. But she was led, at the same time, to see in her own case only an example or illustration of God's manner of dealing with his Church and people at all times. That one so lowly and despised as she was should have had vouchsafed to her a peculiar token of the divine condescension and regard, awakened in her mind lofty conceptions of the character of God, as exercising an universal superintendence over all his creatures,—the meanest as well as the most exalted; and she saw, in the gracious answer which was returned to her own prayer, a pledge

given to the Church that God would never forsake them that seek him. Looking, therefore, beyond the pride and arrogance which had been directed against herself personally, and from which she had found a refuge in God, who had made himself known to her as the God of her salvation, she solemnly warned the enemies of Israel, the heathen oppressors of God's heritage, as well as the wicked among Israel themselves, that the Lord alone was the sovereign Ruler, and that he was the Refuge of his people, on whose behalf he would not fail to vindicate his supremacy and faithfulness, in rendering to his enemies, however numerous and powerful they might be, according to their ways and doings : "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed."

The great principle, indeed, in the divine government, which she was directed to unfold, and which had been exemplified in her own experience, was the abasement of the proud and the exaltation of the lowly,—a principle which had always characterised the divine government, however blind men might be to it,—but which had never been set forth in clearer or more sublime language than that which Hannah was here taught to employ. Her song of praise did, in fact, announce, in brief but very emphatic terms, a truth of which all the divine dispensations before her time, and all the divine dealings since, will be found to be practical illustrations, not only as regards the providence of God, but also as respects the economy of grace. Notwithstanding the disorder and confusion which sin has wrought in the world, and in consequence of which it may often appear as if pride and ungodliness were under no restraint, and as if meekness and humility had no protection, it will be found that God's providential dealings, as recorded in the history of his Church, have been all that Hannah here represents them to be. The people of God are denominated in Scripture the poor, the needy and the humble, the meek and the lowly; and if their temper and character correspond to this description, it is evident that in a sinful world, where it is to be feared they have always been a small minority, they must be subjected to mani-

fold trials from the opposition which ungodliness will ever present to every thing that reflects the divine image. These trials, too, may often be greatly aggravated by the backslidings of the Church,—the inconsistencies of the people of God themselves,—in consequence of which they stand in need of chastisement and correction. When we reflect, then, that, notwithstanding the unequal contest which the Church from the beginning has been called to maintain, and in spite of the hostility which, humanly speaking, has always been more than sufficient to crush her, she has, nevertheless, been preserved, and enabled more or less faithfully to testify for God against the abounding iniquity of an ungodly world,—we cannot fail to perceive that the whole of the divine procedure in regard to her must have been the continued exercise of almighty power, abasing the proud and exalting the humble.

We find, accordingly, that the history of the Church is a record of such divine interpositions,—a series of events in which God has manifested his mighty power on behalf of his people,—sometimes by a visible miraculous agency, making bare his holy arm in the sight of the heathen, and always by the exercise of an almighty and mysterious control, directing even the devices of the ungodly to the accomplishment of his gracious purposes towards the Church. And when with these outward deliverances which he has constantly wrought for his people, both collectively and as individuals, we take into account the spiritual relief and enlargement which he is continually bringing to them,—the grace that gives them fortitude to meet and patience to endure trials which they might anticipate with fear, and may still look back upon with wonder,—the strength by which they are enabled to resist temptation, or the way that is opened up for their escape, so that they are able to bear it,—the resignation to the divine will, and the satisfaction with the divine appointments which he gives them grace to exercise,—and the light of heavenly hope and consolation whereby the Holy Spirit sustains them against the assaults of their great adversary and accuser, who is ever seeking to disturb their peace and overthrow their hope;—when we think of the divine power whereby the people of God are thus sustained under the unceasing warfare which is inseparable from this sinful state, we must see in the song of Hannah, and its varied and appropriate figures, a representation, as faith-

ful as it is sublime, of the manner of God's dealing with his Church.

"The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

It thus appears that Hannah was honoured, not only to be herself an example of the precious truth, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," but to be employed, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to unfold to the Church,—the people of God,—such views of the divine character and government as were fitted to strengthen their confidence in the wisdom of his appointments and in the faithfulness of his promises. But Hannah's song was not only a divinely inspired representation of the principle on which the government of God had always been conducted; it was prophetic, also, of a still more glorious manifestation of that principle than had yet been given, when the Lord "should give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his Anointed." That these words were uttered in the spirit of prophecy, and that they refer to Christ, is, I think, abundantly obvious. The expression "his Anointed," or "his Messiah," is plainly used as a proper name, or the name of a person; and it has been observed that this is the first time that the expression occurs in Scripture in that sense, though afterwards we find it frequently so employed. This passage, then, foretells that, in the person of his Anointed, God was, in a special and very glorious manner, to manifest that great principle of his government which it was the object of Hannah's song to celebrate,—his abasing the proud and exalting the humble. And we might naturally be reminded by it of the history of David, who is frequently called the

Lord's anointed, and in whom the prediction in this passage was strikingly illustrated at least, if it was not exhausted ; inasmuch as the Lord chose him to be his servant, though he was the least esteemed in his father's house,—“took him from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young,” and “brought him,” after enduring much oppression and manifold hardships, “to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.” But David, both in his abasement and in his exaltation, was a type of Messiah. The very purpose for which he passed through such a variety of condition was that he might shadow forth Him who is emphatically the Lord's Anointed ; that he might exhibit more clearly what had been kept before the mind of the Church even from the beginning,—the doctrine of a suffering Messiah ; and David's history, therefore, is rather a renewal than the fulfilment of the prediction in these verses,—a repetition in type of what Hannah foretold in words. For the full accomplishment of these words, we are carried forward to Christ ; and while we see them literally fulfilled in his exaltation as King on God's holy hill of Zion, “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion,” we see also in his previous humiliation, when he was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” the full and complete development of the great principle which had characterised the divine government in all ages in reference to his Church. It was the very oppression to which his people were subjected that served to bring out more fully and clearly his divine power in their protection and deliverance. And so, in like manner, the humiliation through which Messiah passed has unfolded more fully the glory of his exaltation, and has left nothing wanting to his people to reconcile them to the trials through which they must also pass, seeing that in the Saviour's exaltation they have an infallible assurance of their own. The deliverance which he now works out for them does not consist in raising them to worldly honour and distinction, or making them change places with an ungodly world that may oppress them ; for even in Old Testament times, when temporal blessings were designed to constitute part of that which distinguished God's people,—even then, the true Church, those who were really the poor, the humble, and lowly, were frequently, perhaps I might say generally, in a state of outward

trouble, in consequence of the sins of Israel at large, and sometimes, no doubt, on account of their own backsliding. But be the external circumstances of the people of God what they may, they will know in their experience the truth and faithfulness of all that Hannah was directed to say of God's dealings with his Church. The representation which she gives of these dealings was not applicable to Old Testament times alone. And if this remark needed any proof,—if any thing more was required to show that the remarkable song before us stretched forward prophetically to Gospel times,—it is to be found in the fact, which can have escaped nobody who is at all acquainted with Scripture, that when the fulness of time was come for the appearing of Messiah, and when his approaching birth was announced to Mary, she gave utterance to a song embodying the very sentiments, and almost in the same language, which were expressed by Hannah: “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

The striking resemblance between these two sacred songs makes it abundantly evident that they were spoken under the guidance of the same Spirit, and that they related to the same great subject. What an interesting view, then, does it give us of God's gracious care for his Church, to reflect, that, at so early a period as that referred to in the passage before us, the advent and the exaltation of Messiah should have been foretold in terms which were found to be the most appropriate wherein to announce his immediate appearing! The circumstances, too, in which the communication to Hannah was made serve still more clearly to manifest the divine condescension, and to illustrate the principle

which her song of praise was designed to celebrate. It appears, from various intimations to be found in these chapters, that the time at which Hannah lived was a time of great spiritual declension or backsliding in Israel,—and that, as might have been expected, the tokens of the divine favour with which they were wont to be visited had for a season been withheld. The hasty suspicion which Eli entertained of Hannah, when, on seeing her engaged in earnest prayer, but without hearing her voice, he charged her with being drunken, would naturally lead us to conclude that such instances of ungodliness and immorality were not altogether unknown,—else why did the idea so readily occur to Eli? And we shall cease to wonder or doubt that such flagrant sins should have been practised, when we remember what is expressly said in this same chapter of other heinous abominations which were perpetrated even within the precincts of the tabernacle. We are, moreover, told of the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests, that they “were sons of Belial, they knew not the Lord,”—a melancholy fact, which would indicate that there must have been a sad lack of godliness among the people of Israel, when they could bear to see such men holding the holy office of the priesthood. At all events, if their ungodliness was not in part the effect of a general prevalence of irreligion, it would not fail to be the cause of it: and we are accordingly told that, in consequence of their avarice, tyranny, and profaneness, they brought the ordinances of God into contempt with the people; for it is said of them, “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord;”—and their father, in remonstrating with them, charged them with making Israel to sin, saying, “Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord’s people to transgress.” And, finally, the degeneracy of the time is farther intimated by the fact, that immediate divine communications were withheld: for it is said at the beginning of the third chapter, that “the word of the Lord was precious,” or rare, “in those days; there was no open vision.”

And if so, then the true Israel, the Church, those who really feared the Lord, and called upon his name, must have been very desolate and downcast in spirit,—feeling as if God had forsaken and cast off his people, and ready to despond as to any revival of the true religion, seeing that the priesthood itself,—

that which did, as it were, immediately connect them with God,—was so corrupt as to be fitted to bring a curse rather than a blessing upon them. But God was preparing to bring enlargement and relief to his people: he was about to visit and refresh his heritage when it was weary. And the instrument that he was graciously pleased to employ for the commencement of a revival in his Church,—the person whom he honoured with an authoritative commission to announce anew the great promise, which had from the beginning sustained the faith and hope of his people,—was the humble and lowly Hannah. Not only was she herself endued with the spirit of prophecy, whereby she foretold the glory of Messiah; but the son whom she lent unto the Lord was to be the first of a series of prophets, extending through many subsequent generations,—a period so remarkable for the abundance of divine revelations, that the time of Samuel has sometimes been called the beginning of the time of prophecy. Samuel was, moreover, destined to be the instrument of introducing a new order of things in Israel, namely, the kingly government,—a change the immediate occasion of which was the sin of the people, in asking to have a king like the nations that were round about them; but a change which God overruled for blessing his Church with new and more striking, as well as clearer predictions than had before been vouchsafed to her of the glory of Messiah's person, and character, and kingdom. When this change was to take place, Samuel was commissioned to carry it into effect, by selecting Saul, and anointing him king over Israel; and when Saul, in consequence of his disobedience, forfeited for his family the throne to which he had been exalted, Samuel was again commissioned to select a king for Israel, and was honoured to anoint David to that high office,—a man after God's own heart, and the man of all the Old Testament saints who was himself honoured to be the clearest and most significant type of Messiah. And the commencement of this mighty movement may be traced to an humble and probably obscure individual,—“a woman of a sorrowful spirit,”—pouring out her heart before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle. Filled as her soul was with admiration and gratitude, by what she experienced of the divine condescension, how far beyond any thing that she had conceived does her history illustrate the great sub-

ject of her song of praise,—that the Lord abaseth the proud, and exalteth the humble !

And how full is that history of encouragement and consolation to the people of God, in regard both to their own personal interests, and the interests of the Church at large ! It is one of the manifold pledges which God has given them, by examples as well as by express assurances, of his nearness to all them that call upon him in truth and sincerity,—and it shows them with what infinite facility he can connect their spiritual good, however humble and uninfluential they may be, with the advancement of his glory,—and how largely they may be made to contribute thereto, if, like Hannah, they have but a single eye to that glory in all that they desire and pray for. And how encouraging to them to be earnest in prayer and strong in faith, even in times of declension and the decay of true religion ! When Hannah vowed that she would lend her child unto the Lord all the days of his life, she expressed, with great simplicity and devoutness, her earnest wish that the child might, in his day and generation, be a witness for God against abounding, and, to all appearance, growing iniquity. But little did she know what use the Lord had for him, and what great things he was to be the instrument of accomplishing towards reviving the cause of truth and godliness in the land. And what may not God's people hope for, from what they are enabled, in the same spirit as Hannah, to lend unto the Lord, though they may not see, any more than she did, all the fruits of their humble offering ! That offering, at all events, will not be rejected or despised, but will be in its measure, and to the extent which God sees fit, an exemplification of the great principle of the divine government to which the passage before us refers, and which the apostle has stated in very emphatic terms, as containing a brief summary of all the divine dispensations from the beginning : “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

LXXVIII.

THE PRIESTHOOD FORFEITED BY ELI, AND GIVEN TO A FAITHFUL PRIEST.

1 SAMUEL II. 35.

THESE words form part of a message which a man of God was sent to deliver to Eli the high priest. As regarded Eli and his family, it was a message of the most alarming kind, threatening them with overwhelming calamities, and foretelling these calamities in language too unqualified to admit of any hope being entertained that they would not be inflicted. Of Eli's sons, the priests, we are told, in a preceding verse, that they were "sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord:" and it appears that their profane and ungodly practices, as might have been expected, were productive of the most mischievous consequences, in alienating Israel from the service of God, and in fearfully augmenting the irreligion of the age. "The sin of the young men," it is said, "was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." So utterly depraved, indeed, had they become, that God gave them up to judicial blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience, so that no warning or admonition affected them; for we are told, that when they were remonstrated with on account of their sin, "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them."

With regard to Eli himself, we cannot doubt, from what has been recorded of him, that he was a devout man,—that he feared God, and aimed at the advancement of the divine glory,

and the good of his people Israel; and that the conduct of his sons, therefore, was a bitter source of sorrow and suffering. Indeed, it is recorded of him that he admonished and warned them, saying, "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?" But, notwithstanding the piety evinced by this remonstrance, it is a melancholy truth that Eli, through indolence, or a weak and mistaken tenderness towards his sons, was deeply implicated in their sin; for not only is it expressly said of him, that "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not," but, in the divine communication which was made to him, this solemn charge was brought against him, "Wherefore honourest thou thy sons above me?"

In the terrible judgment, therefore, which was denounced against his sons, and was assuredly to be executed, Eli himself was to suffer a chastisement the most severe that we could conceive it possible for him to be subjected to,—more severe, perhaps, than he himself anticipated, till it actually overtook him, though it was very plainly foretold by the man of God who was sent to him. "There came," we are told, "a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And

thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them."

The history of Eli is a mournful, but a very instructive history. The sin in which he was involved, and in the punishment of which he so largely shared, originated in what many, perhaps, would regard as an amiable weakness,—a foolish fondness for his children; and his example holds out a warning against an error as common, I fear, as it is culpable,—and a warning too plain to require any argument or illustration to enforce it. But there were higher interests involved in Eli's sin than those of himself and his family, momentous as these were. In the message delivered to him by the man of God, there was a sentence of very solemn import, as intimating that the consequences of his own delinquency and that of his sons were to extend far beyond themselves and their families. That sentence is contained in the thirty-second verse, where it is said, "And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel,"—or, as it is rendered in the margin, "Thou shalt see the affliction of the tabernacle, for all," that is, instead of all, "the wealth which God would have given Israel." Eli, it may be, did not fully comprehend all that was implied in this very appalling threatening, and might not, therefore, as I have already remarked, anticipate, in all its extent and severity, the chastisement which his sinful indulgence of his children was to bring upon him. But he must have perceived enough of its meaning to awaken the fear, at least, of some calamity that was to overtake Israel, and of which he and his sons were to be the guilty cause; for it did very plainly intimate, not only that blessings were to be withheld, which, but for their sin, would have been bestowed, but also that some disaster was to befall them affecting the tabernacle itself,—that which constituted the glory of their land,—the standing pledge of the divine presence and protection.

And if the words of the man of God did awaken any such fear in the mind of Eli, how painfully must they have been brought to his remembrance, and how greatly must they have aggravated his alarm, when, not long after, his sons presumptuously carried the ark into the field of battle, and, when anxiously waiting the result of the perilous experiment, he “sat upon a seat by the way-side watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God!” But whether the disastrous issue of that battle, when Eli’s two sons were slain, the ark of God was taken by the Philistines, and Eli himself sunk under the overwhelming intelligence, and died,—whether this lamentable issue of the conflict was the fulfilment of the prophet’s threatening or not, there was enough in that threatening, viewed in connection with the ruin that was to overtake Eli’s house, to alarm the people of God, the true Israel, and to fill their minds with gloomy forebodings. It might have seemed to them to foretell the utter extinction of the priesthood,—the removal of that medium of communication whereby God had been wont to convey to them the revelation of his will and the assurance of his favour; and they might have been ready to conclude, therefore, that because of their sins he was about to disinherit and cast them off for ever. And if the prophet’s message to Eli had become known to any of the true people of God before the disastrous battle in which the ark was taken, how overwhelming must that event have been to them, as confirming, apparently beyond all doubt, the darkest of their anticipations and fears! But, independently of that event, the communication made to Eli, at whatever time it became known, was sufficient greatly to depress and discourage them; and, viewed in connection with the backsliding and abounding iniquity of the time, it furnished but too much ground to fear that the Lord was about to forsake them.

But it was always at such seasons that God did especially manifest to the Church his unchangeable faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God; for it will be found throughout the whole course of his dealings with his people, that the severest of his threatenings, even those that were to be carried into effect, were uniformly followed by a renewal of promises, and that, too, in language rich and full, in proportion as the threatenings had been severe and alarming. And such was his method of dealing

on the occasion here referred to. While the judgment denounced upon the house of Eli was in the most unqualified terms,—absolutely excluding all hope of its being either reversed or mitigated,—and while it might seem as if it involved the utter destruction in time of the priesthood itself,—God was pleased to assure his people, the true Israel, for their consolation and encouragement, that he had provided for the maintenance of his own institution, and that, notwithstanding the calamity which the iniquity of Eli's sons was to bring upon the Church, the priesthood would be not only preserved but purified: "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever."

Did we look, in the subsequent history of Israel, for the literal fulfilment of this prediction, in so far as it related to the exclusion of the house of Eli from the priesthood, and the substitution of another in that holy office in his stead, we should find it in the reign of Solomon, as recorded in the second chapter of 1 Kings. During the reign of David, the priests were Zadok and Abiathar,—the former being descended from Eleazar, the son of Aaron; and the latter, who was of the house of Eli, from Ithamar, Aaron's other son. But Abiathar, having taken part with Adonijah in his attempt to seize the throne on the death of David his father, was on that account excluded by Solomon from the priesthood, and would have been put to death but for the consideration that he had shared in the afflictions of David. And this expulsion of Abiathar from the priesthood, and the substitution of Zadok alone in his room, is expressly declared to have been in fulfilment of the prediction in the passage before us; for it is said, "So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord: that he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh . . . And Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar."

But the promise in this passage contains, I think, a great deal more than merely the assurance, that when the family of Eli, in so far as the priesthood was concerned, became extinct, a faithful priest should be found to occupy their place. It was a promise of the perpetuity of the priesthood,—an assurance to the Church

of all future times, that no personal delinquencies of individuals should ever nullify or overthrow God's ordinance, and that his people should never want a divinely appointed medium of communication with himself,—a mediator to transact with God for them, and to present their offerings with acceptance before him. I do not suppose, indeed, that the promise absolutely provided that every individual who might hold the priest's office should really correspond in character with what is here set forth, when it is said, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind." It is not needful, I think, to suppose any such thing. The great object of the promise was to assure the people of God that in all times, even in times of great spiritual declension and outward disaster, the office of the priesthood should ever be found effectual and available for the purpose for which it was instituted, in regard to the Church,—the true Israel of God. And this view of the promise is presented to us in the language of the passage itself, when it is said, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, . . . and I will build him a sure house."

The expression "to build" or make an house for one, is repeatedly employed in Scripture, and evidently means that the individual to whom the promise is given should have a family by whom he should be succeeded, and in whom he should be represented from generation to generation. Thus it was declared to David by the mouth of the prophet Nathan, "The Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house:" and then, as if to explain the import of this promise, the prophet went on to say, "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." And it was this promise regarding his house that especially filled David with admiration and gratitude; for, in offering up his thanksgiving, we find him saying, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? . . . And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concern-

ing his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said." But, large as this promise was, it could not be understood as meaning that every individual who succeeded David on the throne of Israel and Judah was to be like himself,—a man after God's own heart,—for it is a melancholy fact, that it was often, very often, far otherwise ; but it did imply that the kingly office, which had been vested in the person of David, should be perpetuated in his descendants, for the accomplishment of God's wise, and righteous, and gracious purposes regarding his Church.

And so with the promise in the passage we are considering. By that promise the Church was assured of a perpetual priesthood, in so far as was needful for her consolation, and notwithstanding the backsliding and corruption that might at times prevail. And we cannot doubt that it was so. After all the corruptions which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and when the captives were again set at liberty to return to the land of their fathers, Ezra the priest, "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given," was raised up to teach them the law of the Lord, and to offer sacrifice, and to make intercession for them before their God. And when, at the very close of the Old Testament dispensation, we read of a Zacharias, a man "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,"—when we read of such a man executing the priest's office in burning incense in the temple of the Lord, and the whole multitude of the people praying without at the time of incense,—and waiting there till he would come out, and speak to them, and bless them,—can we doubt that there were in that multitude some,—not a few, perhaps,—who experienced the faithfulness of the promise in this verse, and, it may be, remembered the promise itself : "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind : and I will build him a sure house ?"

But the permanency of the priesthood during the Old Testament economy, with the assurance of God's blessing on that institution for the comfort and edification of his Church, does not, I think, exhaust the promise, or furnish a complete fulfilment of the prediction in this passage. The concluding clause of the verse is a remarkable one : "He," that is, the priest,

“shall walk before mine Anointed for ever.” By the Lord’s Anointed here, some have understood the kings of Israel, and especially Solomon, by whom the last of Eli’s race was thrust out of the priesthood. But at the time when this promise was given, the kingly office was not established in Israel; and whether it had ever been established or not, the priesthood would not have been thereby affected. It is not very evident, therefore, how this part of the promise could have contributed much to the comfort of the Church, or even have been, for a while at least, understood, on the supposition that it referred to the kings or kingly office in Israel. But it is full both of meaning and of instruction, if we consider the Lord’s Anointed as referring to Christ, the Messiah, or Anointed. And that it should do so is the less wonderful if we reflect that already had Hannah, in the spirit of prophecy, expressly foretold the Saviour by this name.

Assuming, then, that by the Lord’s Anointed we are here to understand Christ, this passage declares that there should be a priest to walk before him,—that is, under his guidance and direction,—as the great High Priest of the Church, whose servants and representatives the priests under the law were. Though Christ did not formally enter on the execution of his office as Priest until he came into the world, and offered the one sacrifice whereby he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified, yet his priestly office is to be considered as the first, in the order of nature, of all his mediatorial offices. It was in virtue of his having, in the eternal counsels of heaven, undertaken that office, and on the ground of the absolute, infallible certainty of his fulfilling it, that he could be the Prophet of the Church, revealing to her the will of God for her salvation,—because it was only on the assumption that he would as her High Priest make atonement for her guilt, that there would have been any salvation to proclaim to her. Accordingly, this absolute certainty of his one day offering a sacrifice, adequate to a full and complete atonement for all the guilt of all his people, was set forth from the beginning in the institution of animal sacrifice. Such animal sacrifice, so far from being acceptable to God, would have been an insult to his majesty and holiness, if it had not been a pledge, so to speak, that, in the fulness of time, the time appointed by himself, a sacrifice would be offered, sufficient to satisfy the demands of his law,—yea, to magnify that law, and make it

honourable. But there was such a pledge or security given. Christ, as the High Priest of his Church, instituted the ordinance of sacrifice, thereby declaring that he had undertaken to make reconciliation for iniquity; and in every instance in which a sacrifice was offered in faith, and accepted of God, it was because that sacrifice carried with it, as it were, the infallible certainty of the one all-efficacious offering which Christ was to make upon the cross. Hence he has been set forth as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And with the institution of sacrifice he ordained also priests, by whom these sacrifices were to be offered; and while the slain animal represented Him as the victim, the priests who offered it represented Him as the High Priest offering that spotless Lamb "which taketh away the sin of the world," and on the certain sacrifice of which their offerings were accepted.

Of the priests, then, under the law, it might be said generally that they walked before the Lord's Anointed; or, in other words, they were appointed by his authority,—they acted by his direction, and as his servants and representatives, till he should come personally to offer the one sacrifice, on the strength of which their offerings had been available on behalf of his believing people. And, in this view of the subject, the last clause of the verse conveyed another and still more explicit assurance, that the priesthood should be perpetuated during the Old Testament dispensation, notwithstanding all the calamities which might from time to time befall Israel. But it implied more. It contained a promise of a blessing on that priesthood. To walk before the Lord's Anointed must, I think, have implied, not only walking by his directions as servants, but walking in the light of his countenance as their approving Lord and Master, in so far as his Church was dependent on their services for her edification and comfort. And how frequently, then, must the people of God, in Old Testament times, have been comforted and refreshed in seasons of perplexity and trouble, when they called to mind the gracious assurance, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever!"

But it is to the New Testament Church that this passage has opened up, in all its fulness, the inexhaustible fountain of conso-

lation which it contains. Believers now see, as believers of old never saw, even under the purest and holiest of their priests, the fulfilment of the promise, "I will raise me up a faithful priest." Whether it was the mind of the Spirit or not,—as I think it was,—to foretell Christ in these words, as well as in the concluding words of the verse, and so to direct the faith and hope of the Church, "in the cloudy and dark day," to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, it is impossible for us to read the words without at least having Christ brought before us, and without feeling that to him alone can be applied, in their full, literal, and absolute sense, the words, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind." What great and unspeakably glorious things were in the heart and mind of God regarding his Church, his elect people! and who but Christ could accomplish these purposes!

The faithful priest whom God was to raise up was to have "a sure house" built to him,—an unbroken line of successors who should do the service of the house of God. But what was the perpetuity of the Aaronical priesthood,—a perpetuity which, no doubt, was preserved, notwithstanding that each succeeding priest was removed by death;—what was this but a frail and shifting type of the perpetuity of Christ's priesthood,—of Him who is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek? The priest here promised was to walk before the Lord's Anointed for ever, in the enjoyment of his approbation. Christ is exalted to the throne of the universe, as the Lord's Anointed, as King on God's holy hill of Zion; but he has not forgotten his priestly office. He regards it with complacency, and he still executes it with delight; for he is "a Priest upon his throne." And when believers now, in New Testament times, reflect on all this, how abundant should be the consolation which they draw from these words,—fulfilled as they have been in such a way as unspeakably to exceed all that Old Testament believers had ever looked for or conceived! Though even to them,—the saints of the old time,—the promise was large, and full, and free, and unqualified; yet we can easily suppose that they felt as if they were in some way or degree dependent on those who executed the priest's office, and that the character of him who stood between them and God might affect the acceptance of their offering. In times of great de-

generacy, then, such as we find Jeremiah mourning over, when the king, the princes, the priests, and the prophets, as well as the great body of the people, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, departed away from God, and provoked him to anger, setting their abominations in the very house which was called by his name, to defile it ;—in times like these, the remnant,—the true Church,—the few who feared the Lord, and called upon his name,—must have been sorely troubled, perhaps even perplexed, and might be tempted to doubt whether God had not forgotten his promise of raising him up a faithful priest, and building him a sure house.

But believers now never can be involved in perplexity from a cause like this. They know that however degenerate the times may be, and however painful the struggle which they may be required to maintain with that degeneracy, nothing can come between them and the throne of grace, to which their great High Priest has opened up and consecrated a new and living way. The success of their applications there cannot be affected by a fellow-creature : for they have one merciful and faithful High Priest over the house of God, and there is no other,—albeit some still dare to arrogate to themselves that title and office. Servants there are in Christ's house,—ministers of his word and ordinances ; and these may, by his grace, contribute largely to the comfort and edification of his people, or through treachery or unfaithfulness prove a snare or a hindrance. But priests there are none to come between the humblest, the most obscure believer, and that faithful Priest whom God has raised up for himself,—even an High Priest who is touched with the feeling of his people's infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as they are, yet without sin ; and who has assured them of this his sympathy, that they may be encouraged to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. “ Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh ; and having an High Priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

LXXIX.

THE ARK OF GOD TAKEN.

1 SAMUEL IV. 11.

THESE words record the most disastrous event that had till then befallen the children of Israel. Their backsliding and rebellion had frequently brought down upon them the righteous judgments of God. He had at times given them cleanness of teeth in all their cities, and want of bread in all their places ; and when, for all this, they turned not unto the Lord, he gave them up to be smitten before their enemies, and one heathen power after another invaded their land, took possession of their cities, and sometimes, for many years together, ruled over and mightily oppressed them. But amidst all these plain intimations of the divine displeasure, and notwithstanding the almost hopeless condition to which they were reduced, they had still a visible pledge in the midst of them, that, if they turned to God in penitence and faith, he would return and visit them in mercy, subduing their enemies under them, and bringing them deliverance from all their calamities. The tabernacle which Moses constructed in the wilderness still stood at Shiloh, where Joshua had set it up after his subjugation of the land of Canaan. There, in the holy of holies, under the mercy-seat, rested the ark of the covenant,—the chest “of shittim-wood, overlaid with pure gold within and without,” in which were deposited the ten commandments engraved by the finger of God himself on two tables of stone,—the covenant which he

made with Israel in Horeb ; and so long as this sacred deposit remained, uninjured and unprofaned, in the place where, by the divine command, it had been laid up, it was a token for good,—an intimation that God had not entirely forsaken and cast them off. In the time of their backsliding, indeed, when they madly ran into the worship of the gods of the nations around them, the great body of the people of Israel would think little, and care less, about this precious pledge of the divine presence and protection ; and even when they began to reap the bitter fruits of their disobedience, they might be ready to ascribe their reverses to any thing rather than to their own folly in having broken covenant with God, and so forfeited the blessings of that covenant.

But even in the worst times, and when the revolt might seem universal, there were always some, however few, who constituted the Church, the true Israel, the remnant according to the election of grace, who never bowed the knee to a false god ; and to all such, Shiloh, with the tabernacle, the altar of burnt-offering, and the ark of the covenant, would be a precious spot, towards which their thoughts would turn in every season of darkness and disaster. Whether, in times of very great and general defection, true believers were wont to assemble there, and openly testify against the prevailing idolatry, by offering their sacrifices after the prescribed order, we are not informed ; but so long as the means of doing so remained entire,—so long as there was no visible intimation that God had deserted Shiloh, which, for a time, he had chosen to put his name there,—true believers in Israel would still cherish the hope, that however severe might be the judgments with which God visited them, he had not finally given them up,—that the altar was still standing on which Israel might yet offer their sacrifices with acceptance, and that there still remained in safe keeping the ark of the testimony, whereby God might yet make himself known to them as the faithful and covenant-keeping God. But when it was announced that the ark of God was taken by the uncircumcised Philistines, and that this disastrous event was the result of the discomfiture of Israel in the field of battle, where there was a very great slaughter, even thirty thousand men of Israel, and where the two sons of Eli the high priest also fell,

what could every thoughtful man in Israel conclude, but that all the wonderful deliverances in connection with the ark of which their fathers had told them were at an end, never to be repeated?—and what could every right-hearted Israelite say, but adopt the dying language of Eli's daughter-in-law, the godly wife of a godless priest, "The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken?"

But if there was enough in the simple fact of the ark being taken to awaken in the mind of every Israelite the suspicion at least, if not the conviction, that they were no longer to look to the God of their fathers for enlargement and relief, and to fill every true Israelite with sorrow and dark forebodings, the circumstances in which that event took place were calculated to render any return of God's favour still more hopeless. Though it does not appear that the people generally at that period were peculiarly prone to idolatry, yet there is evidence enough to show that great ungodliness prevailed, and that partly, if not mainly, through the profaneness and profligacy of Eli's sons, the priests, the ordinances of God were brought into contempt in the eyes of the people. Shiloh, instead of being the holy place whither the tribes of Israel went up "unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord," had become a scene of the most revolting abominations on the part of a hypocritical and licentious priesthood, whereby the ungodly were encouraged and confirmed in their ungodliness, and the true Israel must have been filled with loathing,—for it is expressly said that "men abhorred the offering of the Lord." Such, then, was the state of Israel when they either thought it expedient, or found it to be necessary, to go out against the Philistines in battle; and, as might have been expected, "Israel was smitten before the Philistines," who "slew of the army in the field about four thousand men." This defeat, however, does not appear to have awakened any suspicion in their minds that their sin was the cause of the disaster that had overtaken them. On the contrary, so blind and insensible had they become to their guilt, that they spoke as if they had been hardly and unjustly dealt with in being worsted before their enemies.

We read of Joshua, that, when he was in similar circumstances, he "rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before

the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads." But on the occasion here referred to, we find a melancholy contrast on the part of the elders of Israel, for they said, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." That even the elders of Israel were under a most miserable delusion, and that they entertained most unworthy and dishonouring thoughts of God, is abundantly evident. But what the precise ground of their hope was, that the presence of the ark would secure for them the victory over their enemies, it is not so easy to determine. Perhaps they might suppose that God could not, consistently with his honour and his truth, fail to put forth a divine power in connection with the ark of his strength, as he had done at the waters of Jordan and by the walls of Jericho, and that far less could he permit it to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines. Or it may be, that from their long-continued familiarity with the idol-worship of the heathen, they had come to regard the ark in the same light as that in which the nations regarded their gods; and so concluded, that, whatever might be the power of God,—the God of their fathers,—that power must necessarily be bound up with the ark, and, consequently, be forthcoming wherever the ark was present. Both notions might, perhaps, be in the minds of the elders and people of Israel. But there are circumstances which would seem to intimate that the latter was the prevailing idea, namely, that the ark was God,—and that if God was able to deliver them, the ark must necessarily be so. We are told that "when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again;" and that "when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. . . . Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness."

It thus appears that the opinion of Israel regarding the ark was very much the same with that which the Philistines entertained of it. When Israel shouted for joy on the arrival of the ark in the camp, it must have been from the recollection of the great deliverances which by its means had formerly been wrought for their fathers; and when the Philistines were filled with dismay on hearing that the ark had come into the camp of Israel, it was, as they have themselves told us, from the reports which they had heard of the same deliverances. But the Philistines believed that the ark was the God whom Israel worshipped; and if the people of Israel were not quite so blind and besotted as to think exactly as the Philistines did, yet they were in reality guilty of making the ark an idol: for if it had not been so,—if they had felt at the moment any thing like a reverential fear of the holiness, and purity, and rectitude of God, and had really been looking to him for help,—what confidence could they have placed in the ark itself, especially as brought thither by such profligate men as Hophni and Phinehas? At all events, they made a solemn and decisive appeal to God whether he would help them,—they did, as it were, hazard their all as a people on the result of that appeal; and when they were smitten, therefore, with a great slaughter, and the ark of God was taken, what could they have any warrant to infer, but that God's covenant with them was disannulled, and that he had forsaken and cast them off for ever?

With regard to vast multitudes, perhaps a very great majority of the people,—all who, as the apostle expresses it, were “of Israel,” but were “not Israel,”—they would have no right apprehension of the magnitude of the evil that had befallen them, or the extent of the fearful loss which they had sustained, if the captivity of the ark was really an intimation that the covenant by which they held possession of Canaan was dissolved, and that the God of their fathers was no longer their God. Even if they believed this, and felt that they could no longer look to God with confidence or hope for help in the time of trouble, still they would have but very inadequate conceptions of the state of desertion and helplessness to which they were given up. Of the loss of God's favour, as the loss of all that could be a satisfying portion to their soul, they could not be at all sensible, any more than unregene-

rate men still are sensible of any loss in being cut off from intimate and friendly communion with God. And with regard to the forfeiture of temporal blessings which they had incurred by the loss of the ark, it was nothing more than they had before voluntarily incurred when they transferred their confidence from God to the false gods of the heathen. They might, indeed, be filled with dismay at the moment when they saw the ark, the object of their blind and superstitious confidence, fall into the hand of their enemies; and for a time they might feel as if their condition were more desolate than it had ever before been. But if they had often before looked to some other quarter than to God for protection in danger, and enlargement in the time of trouble, they would soon begin to feel, that the loss which they had sustained had not materially affected their condition; and their subsequent history does but too clearly show that they did soon sink into a state of stupid insensibility in regard to the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

But what must have been the condition of the true Israel,—the Church,—at that dark and disastrous period? They, too, perhaps, participated to some extent in the superstitious reverence with which the ark was generally regarded by the people of Israel; and their forebodings of immediate coming calamities might thereby be rendered more gloomy. But, independently of any such temporary cause of alarm, there was enough in the captivity of the ark, especially when viewed in connection with the circumstances which preceded and accompanied that event, and with the ungodliness which almost universally prevailed, to fill them with perplexity and fear. God himself had so honoured the ark,—he had given such special instructions for its safe custody,—he had guarded its sacredness by such solemn sanctions, forbidding any one to touch or carry it but the priests and Levites only,—and he had so largely employed it in all his wonderful interpositions on behalf of Israel, from the day that they left the wilderness of Sinai till the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, in the land of Canaan, that all true believers were not only warranted, but required to regard the ark as inseparably connected with their prosperity and permanent possession of Canaan, and consequently the fulfilment of all the promises therewith bound up. And who, then, can estimate the severity of the trial to which their faith

was subjected, when they saw this ark, emphatically called the ark of God's strength, the charter of all their privileges, the security of all their possessions and hopes, not only withdrawn from them, but delivered into the hands of the heathen,—the uncircumcised Philistines? That a thing so sacred, as they were taught to consider the ark to be, should thus have been profaned by unholy hands, must have awakened in the minds of true Israelites feelings which we cannot easily conceive of. And that this consideration did greatly aggravate the calamity seems plainly intimated in the seventy-eighth Psalm, where the Psalmist thus refers to the events of that period: "They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand."

But we must never forget that the severity of the trial to which the faith of the Church,—the true Israel,—was at this period exposed, did not consist in their being threatened with the loss of mere temporal privileges and possessions. The permanence of these was inseparably connected with spiritual blessings. The promise of Canaan as a permanent inheritance, and the promise of Him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed, were indissolubly linked together in the covenant sworn to Abraham; and whatever, therefore, threatened or cast any doubt on the security of the former, was fitted to awaken anxiety and fear as to the fulfilment of the latter. How dark and mysterious, then, must that dispensation have appeared to them, in which God seemed to dissolve his covenant with Israel, —to disinherit his chosen people,—to deliver "his glory into the enemy's hand,"—and to permit his great name to be profaned with impunity among the heathen! and how ready must they have been to say, in regard to their own personal interests, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

The state of the people of God at the time here referred to, as well as the immediate cause of their being brought into that

state, reminds us of another period at which the Church must have been in great darkness and perplexity. I refer to the time when our Lord was delivered into the hands of ungodly men,—when he was crucified, and remained for a time under the power of death. To those who believed in him, but who did not yet fully understand how he was to finish the great work which his Father had given him to do, that must have been a very mysterious event, and one of which it might be said, as it was of the ark, that God had “delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.” We can hardly, indeed, read the passage under consideration, I think, without being reminded of that most marvellous of all events,—the death and burial of the Lord Jesus. I do not say, indeed, that we are warranted to regard the one as designedly typical of the other. But we know that the ark was, in various respects, a remarkable type of Christ; and though there may not be ground for alleging that every circumstance in its history was typical, yet some unquestionably were so, and these of such a kind as that the passage before us naturally suggests, at least, his humiliation and death, if it was not designed to prefigure it.

We find, for example, that when the ark was rescued out of the hands of the Philistines, by the immediate interposition of God himself, and when, at a future period, it was brought by David out of the obscurity in which it had long remained, and carried by him in great triumph to Mount Zion, to be deposited in the tabernacle which he had pitched for it there, it was the occasion of the Psalmist being inspired with songs of adoration and praise, which, though referring to the ark, were descriptive of a far more surpassing glory than it had ever exhibited, and such as could be manifested only in Christ’s exaltation to his throne as King on God’s holy hill of Zion. When we read, for example, in the twenty-fourth Psalm, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in;”—or in the sixty-eighth Psalm, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them:”—we feel that there is something far more glorious in the language of the Psalmist than even the establishment of the ark on Mount Zion,—some-

thing that can only be exhausted by referring it to Christ's resurrection and ascension to glory. If, therefore, the deliverance of the ark from captivity and its elevation to Mount Zion did designedly set forth in type the triumphant resurrection and glorious ascension of Christ, the captivity itself, into which God delivered the ark of his strength, naturally suggests our Lord's previous humiliation, when, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, he was taken, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain.

And if there be thus a striking resemblance between the events themselves, there is an equally striking similarity in the state of trial into which these events brought the Church,—the true Israel,—those who really were the people of God. We have already seen what the condition of true believers in Israel must have been, when the melancholy intelligence was announced, "The ark of God is taken;" and that it did spread among the people of God all the consternation and dismay which we have represented, is abundantly evident from what is recorded of Eli, the high priest, and of his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, to both of whom that intelligence proved fatal. And with regard to our Lord's disciples and followers,—the Church of that time,—the New Testament bears witness that they were, in like manner, overwhelmed in perplexity and darkness, and that, in contemplating the mysterious event of their Lord's death and burial, their faith had well nigh failed them. It is true, provision had been made in both cases for keeping alive the faith and hope of God's people, even amidst the darkness in which they were involved; for while the prophet foretold to Eli that he should see an enemy in the Lord's habitation, and that his own house should be cut off, he was also commanded to say, "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever." And in regard to our Lord's disciples, they had been forewarned in very plain terms that he was to be crucified and put to death; but they were also assured that on the third day he would rise again. For a time, however, they could derive no consolation from such promises. In both cases they could look only at the overwhelming calamity which had come upon them in seeing, as they

thought, the foundation of all their hope and confidence for ever overthrown; and the two disciples who, unknown to themselves, conversed with their risen Lord, expressed the feeling of hopelessness which must have occupied the mind of Israel on the occasion referred to in the passage before us, as it obviously filled their own, when they said, "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

Such was the state of depression, perplexity, and conscious helplessness to which the Church was reduced by the event recorded in the passage under review,—as well as at a future period by another event, of which the former naturally reminds us. In both cases, however, that depression was, at no distant period, to be followed by as remarkable an elevation of the Church, and by new and still more glorious displays of a divine interposition on her behalf. The disciples of our Lord, dispersed, broken in spirit, and afraid of being recognised as having ever known or been connected with him, were soon seen, armed with indomitable fortitude, forward to avow themselves his disciples and servants, and ready to sacrifice all and to suffer every thing for his name's sake,—and there were seen, moreover, countless multitudes, through their instrumentality, added unto the Church, of those who shall be saved. In like manner, in regard to the period referred to in the passage under consideration, at the very moment that the ark of God went into captivity, God was making preparation for a revival of the true religion in the Church. That preparation may be said to have begun with the prayer of Hannah, in answer to which Samuel was given. With him, the spirit of prophecy, which had been in a great measure withdrawn, was restored to the Church; and though the revival and reformation which he sought to advance was for a time, and from various causes, greatly hindered, yet he was destined to anoint as king in Israel the man under whose government the nation reached an unprecedented state of prosperity, and by whom the ark itself was made to occupy a more prominent place than it had ever occupied, from the day that Joshua at his death left it laid up in Shiloh.

Now we, too, look for a revival, and a revival, moreover, unspeakably more glorious than either of these. Every passing year brings us nearer to it; every passing year, also, gives us intima-

tions of its approach; and we professedly wish that we saw it,—that it may come in our day. But the past history of the Church, and the glimpses which Scripture gives us of the future, would lead us to expect, and warn us to be prepared for, a season of trial, to precede the coming glory of the latter day. We are not without intimations, also, that this trial may arise from causes essentially the same as those which brought the Church into tribulation in the time of Eli. At that time, Israel placed their confidence anywhere rather than in God; and even when they abandoned the grosser forms of idolatry, and made something of a profession of the true religion, it was not to turn from their sins by penitence and faith, but to put the ark of God in the place of God himself, and presumptuously to assume that in its presence he would not permit them to be overcome. And such, also, was essentially the character of the Jews, the visible Church, in the time of our Lord. They idolised the ordinances of the ceremonial law, just as their fathers idolised the ark; and with an arrogance still more offensive, rested on their observance of these ordinances as a ground on which they could confidently reckon on their acceptance with God,—not only rejecting Christ, but seeking and procuring his death, because he exposed the fallacy of their hope, and tendered to them his own mediation as the only and the sure foundation of confidence towards God.

It was this spirit,—essentially an idolatrous spirit,—which wrought disaster and ruin in the Jewish Church of old; and the same spirit has but too manifestly pervaded the visible Christian Church in all ages. When we see that spirit, therefore, showing itself with new vigour and growing arrogance,—when we see what arrogates to itself the name of the Church, and denies that title to every other body of the professed followers of Jesus, assuming his authority, and putting itself between the souls of poor perishing sinners and Him who alone can save them,—when we see multitudes, who were supposed to have abjured this presumptuous encroachment on Christ's prerogative, advocating principles and adopting practices the tendency of which is to induce men to transfer their confidence from Christ to mere outward observances, many of them the inventions of men,—and when we see the powers of this world ready to per-

secute the Church of Christ, if it will not submit to be their agent for the accomplishment of their worldly purposes,—can we fail to perceive enough, if left without restraint, to subject the true followers of Christ to great trial and tribulation? And even if this spirit, which has in all ages been a persecuting spirit, should be laid under restraint, is there not enough, both in Scripture and experience, to teach us that, sooner or later, God will execute his righteous judgment against it, and that there will be days of tribulation, as there have been heretofore,—nay, such as have not been since the beginning even until now? And in these tribulations believers must have their share,—just as the Church of old suffered by the captivity of the ark, as bitterly as did those who were the guilty cause of its being taken. But if believers would be prepared for these days, let them be on their guard against the spirit of which we have been speaking. Let them beware of supposing that they are safe because they belong to any particular section of the visible Church of Christ; for to this delusion, I fear, all are more or less prone. Let them remember that it is union, not with this or the other body of professing Christians, but with Christ himself, that will stand them in any stead on that day, or will enable them to say, as believers in past times have often been enabled to say, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

LXXX.

THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART.

1 SAMUEL XIII. 14.

THE person who is here distinguished by the honourable title of "a man after God's own heart," was David the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah. This passage informs us that, in the divine purpose, this person was destined to succeed Saul in the throne of Israel, to the exclusion of Saul's family; and, accordingly, we are told in a subsequent chapter, that the prophet Samuel went down, by the express command of God, to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse, and there anointed David to be the future king of Israel. I say the future king; for it was not intended that David should ascend the throne till after the death of Saul; and in this appointment David himself entirely acquiesced. But, in the meantime, the period that elapsed between the anointing of David by the prophet Samuel, and his actual elevation to the throne, furnished occasions in abundance both for the development of David's character, and the manifestation of God's gracious purposes, not only towards his servant, but in regard to his Church; so that this period, extending to about seven years, is perhaps the most instructive, as well as the most interesting portion of the history of David. Were we to seek in that history, then, for illustrations of what is here said of David, when he is called a man after God's own heart, our inquiry would embrace all that has been recorded of him from the time that Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brethren, and the

Spirit of the Lord came upon him, till the day when it is said of him that "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour." But it is not from the delineation of David's character, or from the record of his achievements alone, that we are to ascertain the meaning of what is here said of him. If we would understand the import of the expression, a man after God's own heart, we must take into view the great change that took place in the constitution of the government under which Israel was placed by the introduction of the kingly office, and the circumstances which led to the exaltation of David, when the Lord "took him from the sheepfolds," and "brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance."

The government under which Israel as a nation were placed is usually called a Theocracy,—that is, a government in which God condescended to be himself the immediate Sovereign. Not only were Israel dependent on and subject to God as the universal Sovereign, in the same way as all other nations have been, and ever must be, but they were his subjects in a peculiar manner. He acted towards them as their Lawgiver, not merely in promulgating to them that moral law which is eternally binding on all his intelligent creatures, but by prescribing to them all those laws which were necessary for their temporal well-being as a community; and he took upon himself, moreover, the administration of these laws, by directly communicating his will to those office-bearers whom he appointed to transact between himself and the people. Such were Moses, Joshua, and the Judges, none of whom, properly speaking, held the office of the chief magistrate in Israel, but were merely servants under God, who held that office in his own hand.

In accordance with this principle, the institutions of Moses were so framed as to give intimation to Israel that God was present with them in a very peculiar manner, even dwelling in the midst of them as their King, directing them in every emergency, supporting them in every enterprise in which he commanded them to engage, and superintending the execution of the laws which he had given them. The tabernacle which Moses was commanded to make in the wilderness, and which was afterwards set up at Shiloh, in the land of Canaan, indicated, in its structure and in its furniture, that it was designed to be the dwell-

ing place of the great King; and provision was made for securing to Israel the permanent enjoyment of the privilege of thus having God in the midst of them, and of being permitted, after a settled order, to apply to the Holy Oracle for counsel and for protection in every time of need. Such was the high and honourable place which Israel occupied among the nations of the earth. I speak not at present of the Church,—the true Israel,—and of the spiritual privileges which they enjoyed under this peculiar dispensation. I refer to Israel in their national capacity, and to the marvellous honour conferred upon them as a people, through whom God asserted and vindicated his own sovereignty in the sight of an idolatrous world, at the same time that he took them for a peculiar people to himself, condescending to dwell in the midst of them, and to act as their immediate Lawgiver and Ruler. Well might Moses say, “What nation is there so great, who has God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” But he did as truly say of them, “O foolish people and unwise;”—“they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.” As in the progress of their degeneracy, after the days of Joshua and of the elders that outlived Joshua, they became weary of the service of the God of their fathers, and, from time to time, turned to the worship of the false gods of the heathen; so, in like manner, they became insensible to the honour and privilege of having God as their king. And they “came to Samuel,” we are told, “and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

That Israel sinned grievously in thus asking a king, and that their sin was aggravated by the pretence of placing their request on the ground of Samuel's infirmities and his sons' misconduct, is abundantly obvious; for their real reason was, that they might be like the other nations, from whom they ought to have esteemed it their honour and their privilege to differ. But we are not left to infer that they sinned in asking a king; for we have the recorded judgment of God himself on their conduct. “The thing,” we are told, “displeased,” or was evil in the eyes of “Samuel, when

they said, Give us a king. . . . And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee : for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done, since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, where-with they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice; howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." Samuel accordingly rehearsed to the people all the words of the Lord, and not only remonstrated with them on the sin of asking a king, but warned them of the burden which they would bring upon themselves if they adhered to their purpose. But he remonstrated in vain. "The people refused to obey the voice of Samuel : and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us ; that we also may be like all the nations ; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

Such was the folly as well as the sin of Israel in rejecting God, vainly imagining that under the government of an earthly king they would experience deliverances and enjoy prosperity which they did not enjoy under the immediate government of God himself. That their request was granted did not in any degree diminish their guilt ; for if God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, did ultimately overrule it for good, that formed no part of the motive by which they were actuated in asking a king. But as, on many former occasions, their discontentment and rebellion had been rendered the occasion of a brighter display of the divine glory ; so, for wise and gracious purposes, God granted them their desire of having a king. They were not, however, to escape the fulfilment of the solemn warning addressed to them by Samuel, when he foretold to them the many grievances which their king would entail upon them for his own gratification ; though it would appear that, through the divine forbearance, these grievances were less painful and oppressive than might have been expected. God himself was pleased to point out the individual who was to be their king ; and by his special command, Samuel anointed Saul to that high office. Being anointed, Saul experienced such a change as implied, I

think, the communication of certain qualifications fitting him for the great and responsible work to which he had been appointed; and, in addition to these, he enjoyed the advantage of Samuel's counsel, who on various occasions delivered to him special instructions received directly from God himself. Saul, too, was successful in various enterprises which he undertook against the enemies of Israel, from which the people might have inferred that they were not to be visited with all the bitter consequences which might have been expected to flow from their sin of asking a king. Nor were they left merely to infer this; for when, after a solemn address from Samuel, followed by thunder and rain, in testimony of the divine authority by which he spoke, the people "greatly feared the Lord and Samuel, and said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king;"—when they were thus brought to see and acknowledge their sin, Samuel was commanded to say to them, "Fear not; ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; . . . for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake; because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. . . . Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

Thus, notwithstanding the sin of the people, the commencement of Saul's reign was very promising; and had he remembered the injunctions of Moses, and followed the counsel of Samuel, the change which took place in the government might have proved less injurious than they had reason to expect, both to the temporal and spiritual interests of Israel. With the perfect foreknowledge of what the people would do, God had commanded Moses to lay down a rule for the guidance of the king whom they might ask to be appointed over them. "When thou art come," said he, "unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me, thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose. . . . And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that

he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." But Saul disregarded alike the law of Moses and the counsel of Samuel. He preferred his own will and the favour of the people to the will and the favour of God; "and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel."

The reign of Saul was thus calculated to aggravate all the evils which might have been expected to flow from the change which took place in the government of Israel, when the people demanded to have a king to rule over them. In that demand they rejected the Theocracy,—they declared that they wished to have a king like all the nations, and that their king might judge them, and go out before them, and fight their battles,—a declaration which plainly implied that they wished to have God removed farther from them,—that they desired to have some one between God and them, whom they might acknowledge as their ruler and deliverer,—and thus be relieved of the necessity of recognising His hand in the events that befell them. This was the tendency of the change which they sought for and obtained in the constitution of the government; and Saul, instead of seeking to counteract this tendency, adopted a policy and pursued a course directly calculated to strengthen it. In doing so, he, of course, brought disaster and defeat upon Israel, for the Lord forsook him; and when, in despair, he would have sought counsel of God, "the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets;" and the armies of Israel, whom Saul had led out to battle, "fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa." Saul also and his sons fell in battle; and thus were fulfilled the words of Samuel, "If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

But if we would estimate aright the sinfulness of Saul's go-

vernment, we must look beyond the disaster and degradation which he brought on Israel. By that disaster he dishonoured God. He did what he could to defeat the great purpose of the Theocracy, namely, the manifestation of God's supremacy as the only living and true God. He furnished ground to the heathen to say and to believe that their gods were greater and mightier than the God of Israel. He gave occasion to the daughters of the Philistines to rejoice, to the daughters of the uncircumcised to triumph. Now, it was in contrast with all this,—it was because he pursued a line of policy the very opposite of that of Saul,—that David was designated a man after God's own heart. The expression does not and cannot mean that David's personal character was absolutely blameless in the sight of God; for that were to say that David was not a sinful man. It is, indeed, said of him, that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." But while we cannot suppose that it was meant to represent David as chargeable only with that one sin, this statement serves to illustrate what is said in the passage before us. The sin of which David was guilty in the matter of Uriah was one of those sins which the law peremptorily required should be punished with death; and in those cases where the individuals entrusted with the execution of the law either did not or could not carry its sentence into execution, the guilty party had reason to believe that God would take the infliction of the punishment into his own hand, as he often did in regard to the people of Israel as a nation, when they became so corrupt as that there were none to execute judgment, and when God, therefore, avenged the quarrel of his covenant by sending famine, or the pestilence, or the sword. David, therefore, by his sin in the matter of Uriah, incurred the punishment of death, just as he would have done if he had been guilty of idolatry; and he was delivered from condemnation only by a solemn repeal of the sentence by God himself: "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

This, however, was the only presumptuous sin with which

David was chargeable,—that is, the only transgression which amounted to a violation of the covenant made with Israel, and, therefore, exposed David to the punishment denounced against such sin. David was a sinner like other men; and no man was ever more feelingly alive than he was to a sense of his manifold transgressions and shortcomings. But in regard to the sins by which Israel would have forfeited their privileges as God's covenant people, he was chargeable with none such, except in the matter of Uriah. In this respect he was the man after God's own heart. His whole policy was calculated to counteract the evil consequences of Saul's reign. Not only did he himself recognise God in every enterprise in which he engaged, but he was anxious to impress Israel with a sense of their privileges as God's peculiar people, and to awaken in their minds zeal for the honour of God, in opposition to the idolatry of the heathen. While he mourned over the temporal calamities which Saul had brought upon Israel, and while his heart was wrung with bitter anguish because of the death of Jonathan, the friend who loved him as he loved his own soul, he was at the same time overwhelmed with the thought of the dishonour which had been brought on the name and ordinance of God in the sight of the heathen by the disastrous battle in which Saul and Jonathan fell. "Tell it not," said he, "in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

This zeal for the honour of God, and for the vindication of God's supremacy, which David expressed when he was about to be exalted to the throne, continued to actuate him during his reign. No sooner was he established in the kingdom, by the adherence to him of all the other tribes of Israel, as well as by that of Judah, than he set himself to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the obscurity in which it had remained during the reign of Saul; for in the days of that king, Israel inquired not at it. It was in connection with the ark that God had made the most glorious displays of his sovereignty on behalf of Israel, in the earlier period of the Theocracy,—the times of Moses and Joshua; and nothing was better fitted to recall to their recollection the wonderful things which God had done for their fathers, and to impress them at once with a sense of their

backsliding, and a deep feeling of their obligations, than to see the ark of the covenant, emphatically called the ark of God's strength, restored to the prominent and honourable place which it ought always to have occupied in the midst of the tribes of Israel. David was well aware of this ; for it was with him a matter of experience, inasmuch as it was in remembering "the years of the right hand of the Most High," and in rehearsing the mighty acts of the Lord, that he found a delightful exercise at all times, and unfailing consolation and encouragement in the time of trouble. He accordingly set himself to bring up the ark of God to the tent which he had pitched for it on Mount Zion, with such a solemnity of preparation, and in circumstances of such magnificence and splendour, as plainly showed, that David himself regarded it as the most memorable event of his reign : for "all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps."

Nor was this all. It was in David's heart to build an house for the permanent dwelling-place of the ark of the Lord ; for he said to Nathan, "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar ; but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." This purpose he was not permitted to carry into effect. But he made such arrangements, and established such an order for the service of the sanctuary, as rendered it more attractive in the eyes of Israel, and more impressive as a testimony against idolatry than it had ever been, perhaps, at any former period of their history. From all that he did, indeed, in his public, official character, and from all that he wrote, as the sweet Psalmist of Israel, it is evident that he was in all respects such a king as Moses had long before described, when he said, "It shall be when" your king "sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites : and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life ; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes, to do them : that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand or to the left : to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." Such was

the king that God required, and such was David. David, therefore, was the man after God's own heart.

The immediate consequence of David's policy, or course of acting, was the temporal prosperity of Israel: for the Lord was with him whithersoever he went, and cut off all his enemies out of his sight, and made him "a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth." But this temporal prosperity was important, chiefly because it was a proof that David had been instrumental in counteracting the effects of Saul's irreligious reign. He did, as it were, revive the Theocracy, and re-establish it in the minds of the people, leading them to acknowledge God as he had never been acknowledged since the days of Joshua, and vindicating the sovereignty of God in the sight of the heathen. And in so far as he did so, he accomplished one of the great purposes for which Israel had been separated from the other nations of the earth,—he was a man after God's own heart.

But we find the selection of David to be king over Israel mentioned elsewhere, and in such a connection as suggests, that there was another reason besides that which we have already considered, why he was called the man after God's own heart. In the eighty-ninth Psalm, we find David thus spoken of: "Then thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant: with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established; mine arm also shall strengthen him." And farther on, "I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. . . . His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven." While David is here, in express terms, personally referred to, and is, in substance, declared to be the man after God's own heart; yet it is plain that the promise recorded in the passage, both as to the extent and permanency of David's kingdom, could be fully accomplished only in the person and kingdom of Messiah. David, therefore, was declared to be one that was

mighty, the Lord's servant, the man after God's own heart, not only on account of what he was personally privileged to achieve for the honour of the Theocracy and the temporal prosperity of Israel, but also as being, in a very special manner, a type of Christ.

And nowhere, certainly, do we find in Scripture, among those who in their public and official character typified the Saviour, any one who did so strikingly or so extensively shadow forth Messiah as David did. Almost from the day that Samuel anointed him to be the future king of Israel, he was subjected for years to a succession of trials, wherein he prefigured the humiliation of Him who was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" while, in his ultimate elevation to the throne of Israel and Judah, he did as clearly typify the exaltation of Messiah as King on God's holy hill of Zion. With regard, indeed, to the state of suffering through which our Lord passed, that had been prefigured, perhaps, in the history of many before David's time: for it appeared to be one of the purposes of God's dealing with his people from the beginning, to make the Church familiar with the idea of a suffering Messiah, inasmuch as the distinguished individuals, who were from time to time raised up to deliver Israel in seasons of great public calamity, were required to execute their commission at the expense of much toil and sore travail,—and not unfrequently at the peril of their lives. But none of them ever typified Christ as David did. It was as the Lord's anointed,—as solemnly set apart to be the future king of Israel,—that he suffered relentless persecution; and his persecutors, those who sought his life, were the constituted authorities of Israel. And so it was with Jesus. In like manner, David's final victory over all his enemies differed from the victories of all who had preceded him, inasmuch as the result of his triumph was his elevation to the throne of Israel, wherein he exhibited a new type of Messiah, representing the Saviour in the glory of his kingly office.

But the typical character of David is still more strikingly set forth in the language which we find employed by himself, and by the inspired writers who followed him. In describing his own sufferings,—in supplicating deliverance,—and in offering thanksgiving and praise for the wonderful things which God wrought on his behalf,—he was carried far beyond any thing

that he could have personally experienced, in the way either of depression or of elevation ; and, in the spirit of prophecy, foretold the sufferings of Christ, and in the very language which Christ himself employed, when “in the days of his flesh” he “offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death.” And in regard to David’s elevation to the throne, it was as explicitly declared to be typical of Christ’s exaltation : for Mount Zion, where David fixed his royal abode,—where also he erected a tent wherein to deposit the ark of God,—and whither the tribes of Israel went up to pay their vows,—this Mount Zion was thenceforth used to represent the Church ; and Christ’s exaltation was not only foretold under the figure of his being set King on the holy hill of Zion, but he was himself set forth by the name of David : “And I will set up one Shepherd over them ; and he shall feed them, even my servant David ; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them : I the Lord have spoken it.”

It was thus that, by the grace of God, David was honoured, as no other man ever was, to typify the person and work of the Messiah, the great deliverer promised from the beginning. To the Church in his own time, his reign proved the greatest blessing which had for a long season been vouchsafed to Israel ; inasmuch as he was instrumental in reviving and maintaining the true religion, and exhibited the rare spectacle of piety and godliness enjoying the royal countenance and favour. In the subsequent ages of the Church, down to the coming of Christ, the history and the writings of David, as explained and applied by the prophets who followed him, must have contributed largely towards keeping alive the faith and the hope of the true Church,—those who, amidst the prevalence of much ungodliness, and under the infliction of sore judgments, were still waiting for the consolation of Israel. And to the Church still, the same history and writings must ever furnish subjects alike interesting and instructive : for both are full of Christ,—the one foreshadowing the history of Christ’s humiliation, and sufferings, and exaltation ; and the other,—I mean David’s writings,—embodying in language the exercises of Christ’s holy human soul, both under the en-

duration of his sufferings, and in the anticipation of his triumph. No wonder, then, that the Psalms of David have in all ages, even of the Christian Church, been regarded by the people of God as a rich treasure of heavenly knowledge,—as the portion of Scripture in the devout study of which they felt themselves brought very near to Christ, and into a state of profound sympathy with him, when reproach had broken his heart, and he was full of heaviness: when he looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but he found none.

And equally rich are the Psalms of David in the experience of believers in all outward circumstances and in all states of inward feeling. Whatever be the condition of God's people in their collective capacity as the Church, or individually as believers,—whether oppressed and cast down in spirit because of sin, or rejoicing in a sense of the divine favour and forgiveness,—whether suffering under the chastening hand of God, or experiencing enlargement and relief after a time of trouble,—whether mourning over abounding iniquity in the world and a low state of religion in the Church, or refreshed with a revival of true godliness, and the prospect of a more rapid and a more extended spread of the Gospel;—whatever be their spiritual condition, and the feelings to which they would give utterance before God, they will find in the Psalms of David the most appropriate language wherein to express them,—because it is the language in which the Holy Spirit taught David to express the same feelings. And believers may judge of their growing spirituality of mind by their growing relish for the writings of the sweet Psalmist of Israel. When we reflect, then, on all that God graciously did, and is still doing by his servant David,—the deliverance which he wrought by him for his people Israel,—the testimony which through him he bare to the character and work of Christ,—and the spiritual food which by him he continues still to furnish to his Church,—we see the fulfilment of all that was predicted of David ere yet Samuel had anointed him, when it was said of him in the passage before us, “The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart.”

LXXXI.

DAVID'S DESIRE TO BUILD AN HOUSE UNTO THE LORD.

2 SAMUEL VII. 1-3.

IN the preceding chapter, we have the history of a transaction which David obviously considered as one of the most interesting and important in which he had ever been engaged,—that of bringing up the ark from Baale, or Kirjath-jearim, and placing it in the tent which he had pitched for it on Mount Zion. At least seventy years had elapsed from the time when the Philistines were constrained, under the dread of God's judgments, to restore the ark, and when it was brought to Kirjath-jearim, and committed to the keeping of Eleazar, the son of Abinadab in the hill. How it was regarded by the people of Israel during that long period, we are not expressly informed. About the end of the first twenty years, indeed, it is said that all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord; and at that time there was certainly a considerable revival of religion, in connection with the labours of the prophet Samuel. Nor can we doubt that there were always some true Israelites to whom the ark was dear, as being associated in their minds with the recollection of all the wonderful works which God had done for them, and who would long, therefore, to see it restored to the place which it occupied in the purer times of the Church. But it would appear that the ark had ceased to be an object of general or national interest to Israel; for we find David saying, in the parallel passage of First Chronicles, "Let us bring again the

ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul." It could not, however, long remain an object of indifference, or be allowed to continue in a state of obscurity, after such a revival of the true religion as took place under the government of David. And David's anxiety to have the ark of the covenant, the token of God's presence and protecting power, brought prominently into the view of the people, that they might be taught to remember where their strength and their safety lay, is abundantly evident from the preparation which he made for bringing it out of the house of Abinadab, and carrying it to Mount Zion. He "consulted," we are told in the First Book of Chronicles, "with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us; and let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul."

This proposal expressed, on the part of David, both a desire after closer communion with God, and penitence for having neglected that privilege: and it was responded to by Israel; "for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people." "So David gathered all Israel together,"—that is, some out of every part of Israel,—“from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim.” But while they proceeded to do so with great pomp, and joy, and gladness, they were suddenly visited with an alarming manifestation of the divine displeasure. They had placed the ark on a new cart, and Uzzah, one of those who drave the cart, “put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his rashness: and there he died by the ark of God.” The sin of Uzzah consisted in his venturing to touch the ark, in violation of a most express commandment; for it is said, in the fourth chapter of Numbers, “When Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall

not touch any holy thing, lest they die." It was, moreover, expressly commanded that the ark should be borne by men, and that the sons of Kohath should be the bearers; and it would appear, therefore, that the whole people of Israel needed to be reminded of the reverence due to the expressly revealed will of God in regard to the ark,—the reverence which had been weakened, it may be, in consequence of the long period during which the ark had been forgotten or despised. And we find David soon after acknowledging that they had not proceeded in the right way, or after the due order, in bringing up the ark from Kirjath-jearim; for "none," said he, "ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever." In the first instance, however, David was greatly depressed and downcast in spirit. He "was displeased," it is said, or greatly agitated, "because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah, . . . and David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said," with something like despondency, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom," where it abode three months; "and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

What David purposed to do after this visitation of God's chastening hand, we are not informed. But he was soon delivered out of the perplexity in which we could conceive him to have been involved. Intelligence was brought to him, that the Lord had blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertained unto him, "because of the ark of God;" and David rightly interpreted this gracious interposition of God's providence. He read in it a very plain intimation, that though God saw fit to visit with a special mark of his displeasure the presumptuous rashness of Uzzah, and the irreverence or culpable forgetfulness of Israel at large; yet David's purpose of honouring the ark, by bringing it into a tent on Mount Zion, was not offensive to God, and that, if done from a right principle, and in a right manner, the act of homage implied in it would be accepted; and that, in consequence thereof, God would again visit and refresh his inheritance, which for so long a time had been weary. Such, obviously, was the inference which David drew from the blessing wherewith God

blessed Obed-edom, and his house. "So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness,"—taking care to do so in strict accordance with what Moses had commanded; for he said unto the chief of the fathers of the Levites, "Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order." "So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it. . . . And as soon as David had made an end of offering the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. And all the people departed, every man to his house:" and "David returned to bless his house."

We can easily conceive with what joy and gratitude David would look back on the work of that day,—the accomplishment of an object that evidently lay very near his heart. The ark of God had for many years been separated from the tent or tabernacle which Moses constructed for it in the wilderness, and which Joshua had permanently set up in Shiloh: and during a considerable part of the same period, especially during the reign of Saul, the people had experienced much disaster,—the consequence of forsaking God, and forgetting where their strength lay. But now David brought the long-neglected pledge of God's presence and favour out of its obscurity, and placed it in the tent which he had prepared for it on Mount Zion;—not by a mere act of his royal authority, in which some of the true Israel might have rejoiced, and which others might approve of, because it was the king's doing; but by asking counsel of God, and solemnly appealing to the Levites, and to the whole people of Israel, to prepare themselves for bringing again the ark of their God unto them. When the people, therefore, generally, obeyed the call of the king, and, with every appearance of sincerity as well as with joy and gladness, took part in the solemn work of carrying the ark to Mount Zion, they did, in a most emphatic manner, disown idolatry, and avouch the Lord to be their God. What

proportion of those who engaged in that transaction were the true spiritual Israel, we cannot tell. But never, perhaps, since the time of Joshua, had there been such a general profession of the true religion, on the part of Israel, as on the memorable occasion here referred to; and with what gratitude, then, would David contemplate so universal an acknowledgment of the true God! How fondly would he hope that idolatry, into which Israel had so frequently fallen, was now to be put down for ever! And how confidently would he reckon on the stability of his throne, and the prosperity of his kingdom, as a testimony to all the nations round about, that the God of Israel was the only living and true God!

And, indeed, we find that David did not only cherish, but express sentiments like these on the occasion of bringing up the ark to Mount Zion; for on that day he delivered first into the hand of Asaph the hundred and fifth Psalm "to record, and to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel." The verses under consideration intimate, too, that such also were the exercises of his soul in retirement; for when he "sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies," the ark of God was the subject of his devout meditations. With the recollection of all the marvellous events which such a subject could not fail to awaken, it is evident that his thoughts were especially occupied with the solemnities of the memorable day when he was honoured to bring the ark to Mount Zion, and when God put it into the hearts of the people to unite in that work, and publicly to declare that the Lord was their God. But David was not satisfied that he had done or attempted all that he ought to attempt, for the glory of God, in connection with the ark of the covenant. Though he had brought it out of obscurity, and placed it prominently before Israel, yet the place of its abode was but a tent of curtains; and it would appear as if his heart had smitten him at the thought of his own royal residence, when compared, or rather contrasted, with the humble dwelling-place of the ark of God. "The king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." David needed not to say more of his desire and pious purpose. These few words were sufficient fully to disclose what was in his mind; and the prophet,

believing that the king's desire to build an house—a permanent dwelling-place for the ark—proceeded from zeal for the glory of God, and concluding, though hastily, as it afterwards appears, that he would be permitted to carry his purpose into effect, encouraged David to go forward with his design, assuring him that the blessing of the Lord would be vouchsafed to him. “Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.” The same night, however, the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, commanding him to go and tell David, that he was not to build an house unto the Lord; for that the honour and the privilege of doing so were reserved for his son.

But we are not to conclude, from this prohibition, that David's purpose was displeasing to God, or that the motives by which he was actuated were not such as God could approve. On the contrary, we have the clearest proof that David's design was approved of, though his desire of carrying it into effect was not granted him. We find Solomon expressly saying, “The Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart: nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son, that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name.” But besides this express testimony, there is enough in the message which Nathan was commissioned to carry to David, to show that God regarded David with complacency and approbation; for not only was David assured that his son should sit upon his throne, and should build an house to the name of the Lord, but the stability and the permanency of that throne were foretold in such terms as could only be fully accomplished in the person of the Messiah. “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.” Such great and glorious promises, respecting his house and his throne, did not merely reconcile David to the divine ordination whereby he was prevented from building an house for the ark of God, but filled him with amazement as well as gratitude; for he “went in and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou

hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant."

The gracious communications thus vouchsafed to David were intimately connected, as we have seen, with the zeal which he had manifested, and still continued to feel, for the honour of the ark, and the manifestation thereby of the glory of God. And even though the ark had concerned only the Old Testament Church, and had no important bearing on the Church now, still the subject before us would be full of interest and instruction, as showing us how holy men of old were exercised in and about divine ordinances, and how occasions of observing these were, to them, times of revival,—seasons of refreshing. But apart altogether from the opportunities which it affords for exhibiting the experience of the Old Testament saints, there is much in the history of the ark itself to minister to the comfort and edification of the Church still. And there is, perhaps, no portion of that history to which this remark is more applicable than the circumstances here referred to, and fully detailed in the preceding chapter. Whatever the spiritual Israel—the true Church of that time—might see in the ark, much more is seen in it by the Church now. To Israel, indeed, it was a token of God's presence, a pledge of his protecting power, and a visible demonstration of his faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God: and it had been largely employed, both to awe the Israelites themselves into holy reverence and fear, by impressing them with a sense of God's nearness to them, and to execute on the enemies of Israel those divine judgments whereby God asserted his supremacy in the sight of the heathen; for it was in connection with the ark, as every one will remember, that God wrought many of his most wonderful works on behalf of Israel.

But though the Old Testament Church did, in the first instance, and more immediately, reap the benefit of the divine interpositions which took place by means of the ark, yet all those interpositions were but typical intimations of an infinitely more glorious interposition, of which even the spiritual Israel had but a very dim apprehension, compared with the full and unclouded light in which believers now see it,—even the mani-

festation of the Son of God in the flesh, and the accomplishment of his mediatorial work. The ark itself, viewed in the position assigned to it under the mercy-seat, in the holy of holies, did most significantly set forth Christ. It contained the two tables of stone whereon were written, by the finger of God, the ten commandments,—that law from which one jot or one tittle could in no wise pass till all were fulfilled ; and to intimate this inflexible rigour of the law, the most solemn injunctions were given to all, except the priests, to beware of touching the ark in which it was deposited. The placing of the ark under the mercy-seat was, in like manner, very significant and full of meaning. It implied, on the one hand, that mercy could not be extended to sinners, unless, at the same time, the honour of the law were fully vindicated, and its demands satisfied even to the uttermost. But, on the other hand, it intimated that there was a mercy-seat from which God was ready to dispense pardon in perfect consistency with the sternest demands of the law,—so that he could be just, even in justifying sinners. And thus the whole of Christ's mediatorial work, so far as concerned the justification of his people, was most significantly set forth by the ark, and the place which it occupied in the tabernacle. In allusion, perhaps, to the ark, as containing the law in safe keeping until it should be honoured and satisfied, Christ is represented in the fortieth Psalm as saying, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire ; mine ears hast thou opened : burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God : yea, thy law is within my heart." And in like manner, it may be in allusion to the mercy-seat, called the propitiatory, or the place where God appeared propitious or reconciled to his people, that the apostle says of Christ, that God hath "set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, . . . that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

If we are familiar, then, with these facts and doctrines, it will hardly be possible for us to peruse the history of the ark without being forcibly reminded of the person and work of Christ ; and the remark, I think, is especially applicable to the

circumstances recorded in the passage before us. The obscurity and neglect in which the ark was long permitted to remain, will suggest to us the state of humiliation to which Christ descended, when it could be said of him, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." In like manner, when we read of David bringing the ark out of obscurity, and carrying it in triumph up to Mount Zion, we are as irresistibly reminded of the exaltation of Him who, having descended into the lower parts of the earth, afterwards ascended into heaven, there to be placed at the right hand of the Highest, the object of adoration, and gratitude, and confidence, and love to his Church,—his redeemed people. And this impression regarding our Lord's exaltation, received from such a passage as that before us, will be much deepened by perusing the various Psalms composed by David in commemoration of the event here recorded,—Psalms which are obviously prophetic, and which could receive their complete fulfilment only in Christ, when he rose from the dead, and was exalted with the right hand of God, "to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." If, then, we are true believers, we can sympathize with David in the admiration, gratitude, and joy, which he felt when he celebrated the exaltation of the ark to Mount Zion, and made that event the occasion of a high and holy solemnity. We, too, have a solemnity in which we commemorate all that was most interesting and important in the transaction of the memorable day here referred to,—even the finished work of Christ. The holy ordinance of the Supper, though externally a very simple thing, compared with the splendour and magnificence of the Old Testament festival, is not the less significant and full of meaning. We observe that ordinance in commemoration of Christ's death,—in the faith of his resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father,—and in the hope and prospect of his second coming. Of these glorious objects David had but a dim and partial apprehension, as they were presented in type, or unfolded to him by the Spirit of prophecy. Yet he saw and understood enough of them to fill his heart with joy and gladness, in the observance of those ordinances which were

designed to prefigure them. And how full, then, should be the joy of believers in observing the Gospel ordinances, which have been appointed, not to shadow forth the death and resurrection of Christ as yet future and imperfectly revealed, but to commemorate them as actually accomplished,—and accomplished for this purpose, that believing worshippers may have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.”

LXXXII.

SOLOMON APPOINTED TO BUILD THE HOUSE.

2 SAMUEL VII. 13.

It appears from the preceding verses that David, after bringing the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim, and placing it in the tent which he had constructed for it on Mount Zion, was anxious still further to honour it ; and, with this view, had it in his heart to build an house for it, as at once a more enduring and a more befitting abode for that precious token of the divine presence in the midst of Israel. It appears also, that when David first hinted his purpose to Nathan the prophet, Nathan encouraged the king to proceed, saying, "Go, do all that is in thine heart ; for the Lord is with thee." The same night, however, the word of the Lord came unto Nathan the prophet, commanding him to go and tell David that it was not the divine will that he should build an house to the name of the Lord ; but at the same time to assure him that his son should be honoured and privileged to do so ; and this assurance is contained in the passage under consideration, in connection with the preceding verse. "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name ; and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever." This assurance is followed up, in the subsequent verses, by exceeding great promises regarding the permanency and stability of the throne of David and of his son,—imply-

ing, not only that there was to be a long succession of kings that were to sit on that throne, but that this lengthened line of kings were to introduce a government of which there was to be no end; the Head of that enduring government being still the Son of David.

This, of course, was Christ, to whom these promises mainly referred, as we shall afterwards have occasion more fully to show. But in the meantime I would observe, that while David was thus told that he was not to be permitted to build an house for the ark, or to the name of God, and that this privilege was to be reserved for his son, no reason appears to have been given to David, at least on the occasion here spoken of, why he was not allowed to do all that was in his heart for the honour of the ark of God, though it is testified of him that his desire and his purpose met with the divine approbation. We find, however, reasons elsewhere assigned for this divine determination. It is recorded of David himself, in the twenty-eighth chapter of 1 Chronicles, that, having assembled all the chief men of his kingdom to Jerusalem, he stood up and said, "Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: but God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood. . . . And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father." And in reference to the same subject we find Solomon saying, in his communication to Hiram the king of Tyre, "Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the Lord his God, for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent." From these and other statements on the subject, it is plain that the building of an house of rest for the ark was designed to stand out prominently in the sight of Israel as a great and mighty undertaking,—as a work that was not to be hastily executed by David at the close of a reign which had been chiefly spent in contending with and conquering the ene-

mies of Israel,—as a work, in fact, of sufficient magnitude and importance to form the one great enterprise of a king who could give himself to it without distraction or disturbance. Such was obviously the impression which the divine appointment, regarding the building of an house for the name of God, must have made on the minds of the people of Israel,—the Church of that day; and the reason why David was forbidden and Solomon was permitted to build that house is still more clearly unfolded to us, now that the promises and predictions connected with that work have been and are in the way of being fulfilled.

These promises and predictions referred to Christ; for one of the great purposes to which the establishment of the kingly office in Israel was rendered subservient, was to typify and illustrate the mediatorial work of the Saviour. When Israel first demanded a king, their demand was offensive in the sight of God, and they were ultimately brought to a sense of their sin. But their request was granted; and God was pleased to employ the appointment of the new form of government for the purpose of unfolding more largely the kingly office of Christ. In accordance with this gracious purpose, David was honoured to be an eminent type of Messiah, inasmuch as, by his trials, his conflicts, and his conquests, he did very significantly prefigure a suffering, but, at the same time, a triumphant Saviour. This, however, was only one aspect of Christ's kingly office,—that in which he is presented as bruising the serpent's head,—as spoiling principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, even in his humiliation and death,—and as ascending up on high, leading captivity captive.

But there is another view of Christ's office as king, and of the nature of his kingdom,—even the relation in which, in that character, he stands to his Church, his redeemed people. In reference to them, an apostle declares that his kingdom is the reign of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and in these few words he expresses the substance of many an Old Testament prophecy, where, in every form of expression, and in every variety of beautiful figure, are set forth the peace and blessedness of Messiah's kingdom. This view of Christ's kingly office, then, God was also graciously pleased to typify or prefigure in the kingly office as it had been established in Israel;

and we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom which provided that this should be done, not in the person of the same king who was employed to represent Christ in his conflict and his victory, but in that of another, who should be pre-eminently a peaceful king. It was, as it were, too much for any one individual to represent in his own person both views of Christ's kingly office;—just as in the case of the Saviour's atonement, as typified or prefigured in the solemnities of the great day of expiation. In that most significant service, two goats were employed to represent the great atoning sacrifice of Christ,—the one being slain, to set forth the death of the Saviour—the actual shedding of his blood,—the other being sent as the scape-goat into the wilderness, bearing upon it the sins of the people, to denote the taking away of the guilt of sinners by the blood which Christ shed. And so two kings were employed to typify, in all its fulness, the kingly office of Christ:—David to set forth Messiah's trials and triumph, and Solomon to typify the peace and blessedness of Christ's spiritual kingdom. To David, therefore, it was said, "Thou shalt not build an house for my name," but thy son, "he shall build an house for my name; and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever."

The passage under consideration of course refers immediately, and in the first instance, to Solomon. The words, "He shall build an house for my name," were simply an announcement to David, that the house which he had it in his heart to build should not be built by him, but that it should assuredly be built by his son. And when it was added, "I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever," David was farther assured that the throne to which he himself had been exalted should not only be occupied by his son and immediate successor, but that it should never be transferred from his family to another,—that so long as it was a throne, it should be occupied by a descendant of David. This, indeed, is expressly declared to be implied in the passage before us, when it is said, in a subsequent verse, "My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee." Thus, an absolute and unqualified promise was made to David, that his kingdom should continue in his house or family so long as it was a kingdom, notwithstanding of the declensions or backslidings where-

with his immediate or more remote descendants might be chargeable, and on account of which they might justly forfeit their right to the throne. The terms of the promise itself implied all this. But, to remove or prevent all doubt on the part of David, he was expressly told, that the promise was made in the perfect foreknowledge of all such backslidings on the part of his descendants, but that for none of these would God permit his promise to fail, or alter the word that had gone out of his mouth. "If he,"—that is, Solomon, or any of his successors in the throne,— "if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee."

How often this threatening of the rod and of stripes required to be executed is abundantly testified by the future history of the heirs to David's throne. Even Solomon himself furnished melancholy occasions for the visitation of God's chastening hand. Still, the promise was fulfilled in a long line of kings, the descendants of David, who successively occupied his throne; and that throne was never transferred to another family. But while all this is implied in the passage under consideration, it does not exhaust its meaning. There is evidently a great deal more in the passage before us than merely the promise of a succession of kings, of mortal men descended from David, and heirs of his throne, however far that succession might extend. The expression "for ever," applied three times to David's house and throne, within the compass of a few sentences, would warrant us, I think, to conclude, that the promise involved something far more glorious, as well as more permanent, than merely a long line of kings sitting on the throne of David, even though their reigns had been unspeakably more illustrious than they were found actually to be. These reigns, so far from furnishing a history of men seeking, as David did, the advancement of God's glory, and the vindication of his supremacy in the sight of the heathen, present, with occasional exceptions, a record of continued declension on the part of the kings, and consequent disaster to the people, not only in the temporal calamities which befell them, but in the spiritual debasement into which they sunk. We cannot read the history of these reigns, at the

same time bearing in remembrance the passage before us, without feeling that such a succession of kings, however long continued, never could fulfil all that was implied in the promise given to David in the passage under consideration,—nay, that such a line of kings could not have been endured, if it had not been that it was to terminate in the exaltation of One, in whose person and government were to be fulfilled all the glorious things which had been spoken of David's house.

We are thus irresistibly carried forward to Christ, when we seek for the fulfilment of the prediction contained in this passage. That Christ was included in that prediction is abundantly evident: for it was said of him by the angel that appeared unto Mary, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Christ, then, being descended from David, and exalted to David's throne, must have been included in the prediction which declared that the throne of David should be established for ever. But if included, he must have been the main subject of that prediction: for what were all David's heirs compared with him who is "the Son of the Highest," himself "King of kings, and Lord of lords,"—"who is over all, God blessed for ever!" The long succession of kings between David and Christ did little, even the best of them, to establish the throne of their father; and the greater part of them were borne with,—as a divine patience alone could have borne with them,—only because by solemn covenant the throne was reserved for the rightful heir. Of not a few of these kings it might have been said, as Ezekiel the prophet said of one of them, "Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end; thus saith the Lord God, . . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Christ was thus the heir of the promise here made to David; and, accordingly, we find the very words of the immediately following context directly applied to Christ by the apostle: for in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he reckons up various Scripture proofs of our Lord's eternal Sonship, he expressly quotes the words of the fourteenth

verse, "I will be his Father, and he shall be my Son." "For," says the apostle, "unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

But though the passage under consideration did mainly refer to Christ, as the King in whom alone it was to be fully accomplished, yet, as we have already seen, it did immediately, and in the first instance, refer to Solomon. David must have so understood it; for the promise which it contains, as well as all that follows it in the next three verses, was spoken to reconcile him to the divine determination of not permitting him to build an house to the name of the Lord, as it was in his heart to do. The prediction, therefore, must, in a certain sense, have been fulfilled in Solomon; or, as I would rather be disposed to say, the prediction concerning Christ, here recorded in words, was renewed in very significant terms in the main transactions of Solomon's reign,—that is to say, what Solomon was permitted and privileged to do was a pledge to the Church, the true Israel, that what is here foretold of Christ would in due time be fulfilled. Now, the great work which was assigned to Solomon,—that which constituted the glory of his reign,—was, as the passage before us promised, building an house for the name of the Lord; and it is on this account especially that he is here set forth as a type of Christ.

Of the greatness of this work, as it appeared in the eyes both of David and Solomon, we may form some idea from the manner in which they spoke in looking forward to it. David we find thus expressing himself: "Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it." And when Solomon was about to enter upon the undertaking, he looked forward to it with reverence and awe: for we find him saying in his communication to the king of Tyre, "Behold I build an house to the name of the Lord my God; . . . and the house which I build is great; for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice

before him." "The house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great." Nor did the reality fall short of the anticipation. "Thus Solomon," we are told, "finished the house of the Lord, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the Lord, and in his own house, he prosperously effected:" and in looking upon his finished work he was enabled to say, "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever. . . . Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it."

But the chief glory of that house did not consist in its outward grandeur and magnificence, great as these were. When Solomon had deposited in it the ark of the covenant, and had offered sacrifices and burnt-offerings, and had presented his supplications before God, "the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house;" "so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." And the same night, "the Lord appeared to Solomon, . . . and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. . . . Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." The glory of this house, then, and the marvellous honour conferred on Solomon in being appointed to build it, lay in this, that God took up his abode there by a special visible token of his presence,—dwelling in the midst of his people as their king,—pledging his power and faithfulness for their protection,—and blessing them with prosperity and peace. The divine presence in the temple on Mount Zion was in reality a pledge of God's nearness to every believing Israelite, in every corner of the land,—nay, even though sojourning in the land of strangers: for it was Solomon's petition,—and the petition was heard and granted,—that if Israel, in any place, and in any circumstances, should pray unto the Lord, towards their land, and towards the city which he had chosen, and towards the house which Solomon had built for his name,—then

the Lord would hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven his dwelling-place, and maintain their cause.

Thus the temple was identified with all that was valuable to Israel,—all that was dear to the hearts of God's believing people. They felt that while he dwelt there, he was dwelling with them; and that the gracious promise, "I have hallowed this house... to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually," was in reality a promise that he would ever be near to them when they called upon him,—a very present help in the time of trouble. Every promise, indeed, which was given concerning the glory and stability of the temple, was in truth a promise of the preservation and prosperity of the Church, the true Israel; and we find accordingly that no small portion of these promises were spoken of the temple, or of Mount Zion, on which the temple was built, and of which it was the glory. Mount Zion, indeed, began to be spoken of as representing Israel, God's covenant people, from the day that David carried thither the ark of the covenant, because from that day the pledge of Israel's strength and security lay there. And if so, then the appropriateness of such an application of the word "Zion" appears still more evident when Solomon had erected there a permanent and a befitting dwelling-place for the ark of God's strength. And so, in innumerable passages in the Psalms, and in the writings of the prophets subsequent to the time of David, Zion is used to denote the Church,—the true covenant people,—the Israel of God. A peaceful and prosperous state of the Church is set forth by a description of Zion in all its strength and beauty: "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." A season of adversity and disaster to Israel, consequent upon backsliding on their part, is described by Zion being desolated or laid waste: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." And in like manner, the returning marks of God's favour to his penitent people are foretold in promises of the restoration of Zion: "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing;

for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.... When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory."

It appears, then, that in no small portion of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Church of God,—his covenant people,—are everywhere set forth under the figure of a building; and that in this figure the house built by Solomon on Mount Zion occupies a prominent place,—that house, as containing the ark of God, being undoubtedly the great bulwark, the chief of the palaces of Zion. When, therefore, we directly apply the passage we are considering to Christ, and understand it as having been said of him, "He shall build an house for my name," we are interpreting it in strict accordance with the general scope and spirit of the Old Testament Scriptures. If the Church of God,—the whole body of true believers,—are represented as an house, erected for the name or to the glory of the Lord, then Christ is the builder of that house, whatever instruments he may employ in carrying on that work. He undertook, and he only could undertake, the mighty work of rearing, out of the ruins of man's fallen nature, a living temple, a spiritual house, a fit habitation for God to dwell in, and an eternal monument to the praise of the glory of his grace. To accomplish this, it behoved him to take the nature of those whom he was thus to redeem and exalt, and, having so humbled himself, to become obedient unto the death. But the great work of erecting this spiritual temple was not delayed, its commencement was not deferred, until he had actually become incarnate, and had suffered and died. On the strength of that covenant whereby he had voluntarily bound himself to endure the penalty which sinners had incurred, his engagement on their behalf was made available for their deliverance from the bondage of sin and death. His undertaking was announced from the beginning; and from the beginning, they who believed and relied on that announcement passed from death unto life, and became partakers in all the blessings and privileges of the children of God.

Christ's work, then, of building an house for the name of the Lord began with the conversion of the first sinner unto God, and

has continued ever since to advance,—every new conversion being the addition of a new living stone to that temple; and the passage we are considering is one of many sure and sealed promises that the work will be finished. At times, it may seem as if the work made but slow progress; and even in so far as it has advanced, it may not exhibit that symmetry and beauty which did so peculiarly characterise its type,—the temple built by Solomon on Mount Zion. The Church does not, either in its individual members or in its collective capacity, present that harmony in its parts, or that unity as a whole, which might be expected in a body compared to a temple, in which every individual forms a living stone fitted and fashioned by the hand of the Master-builder himself for the place which it is designed to occupy. The language of the Old Testament, as we have already seen, represents the Church under this beautiful figure of a temple or house, or a city that is compact together. And the New Testament is full of similar representations. “Now therefore,” says the apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians, “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” “Ye also,” says the apostle Peter, “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

Such representations might seem to warrant the expectation, that the Church universal, of which such glorious things are said, would exhibit the living reality of the order, and harmony, and beauty which are so strikingly described. And yet, how very different has the reality hitherto been! It is true, the visible Church contains many who do not yet belong, and who may perhaps never belong, to the true, and, consequently, will never have a place in the spiritual temple which Christ is rearing. It is not, therefore, in the visible Church, in its present state, that we can expect to see realised the beautiful imagery of Scripture. And besides this, it is also true, that even they

who are members of the true Church are but imperfectly sanctified. They are still under the hand of Him who is preparing them for the place which they are ultimately to occupy in his spiritual temple. They are still but imperfectly polished, though they are undergoing the polishing process. And, therefore, though there were none but true believers in the visible Church, we would not find in it now, and we would not have found in any former age, the complete prototype, the perfect reality, of the house or temple which is both described and prefigured in Scripture.

But while there is enough in these considerations to explain why it is that we do not see in the Church of Christ, as a body, the union, and harmony, and beauty which have been ascribed to her, both in type and in description, still there is reason enough to lament the unseemly rents which have defaced the temple, beyond what the remaining imperfections of the members of that Church might have been expected to produce. And this consideration ought to be the subject of deep humiliation to all who are truly anxious to see God glorified in and by his Church. But, in spite of all such obstacles, Christ will perfect the work which has been given him to do. The language of the eternal covenant in regard to him is, "He shall build an house for my name." A pledge of the fulfilment of this promise was given in the temple which Solomon, as a type of Christ, built upon Mount Zion; and the promise will assuredly be fulfilled. Even in this present state, we are encouraged to look for such a condition of the Church as shall more closely resemble the peaceful period of Solomon's temporal reign than the Church has ever yet exhibited,—when the rents which disfigure the fair face of the spiritual building shall be filled up,—when "the envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off;" when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." But however this may be, the temple,—the spiritual house,—which it has been given to Christ to build for the name of the Lord, shall be exhibited at last in spotless beauty and unfading glory. Every stone in that temple will be framed and fashioned with divine skill for the place prepared for it; and God himself will dwell in it for ever and ever.

If such be the great work which Christ has been and is now

carrying on, what a large place ought the subject to occupy in our thoughts! The great object of all that Christ endured, in so far as man is concerned, was to "build an house" unto the name of the Lord, the materials whereof are the fallen, guilty, and debased children of men. To render them capable of being thus united into one great and glorious fabric, to remain an eternal monument of his redeeming grace and power, to the praise and glory of God the Father, it behoved him to suffer and die in their room. With this indispensable condition he willingly engaged to comply, and has actually complied; and now he is exalted at the right hand of the Highest, having had committed to him all power in heaven and on earth, that he may carry into effect the great purpose which is briefly but very comprehensively stated in the passage under consideration. The Scriptures everywhere testify that this is the purpose for which Christ reigns as Mediator, and must reign till it be accomplished. It must, therefore, be the great end for which the present state of things exists. Christ is supreme Ruler in heaven above, and on the earth beneath,—the King of kings, and the Lord of lords; and the great purpose for which he has been exalted must be that also, to the accomplishment of which all things which are under his control shall be rendered subservient. If, then, we really believe all this, how little, how comparatively uninteresting, should all earthly changes and events be to us, except in so far as they bear on the accomplishment of the great purpose for which the Son of God was humbled and is now exalted! We may not be able, it is true, to see the bearing of many occurrences on the cause of Christ, whether in the way of helping or hindering that cause. But if we feel any concern in Christ's work,—if we have any right apprehension at all of its magnitude and importance,—it may surely be expected that in regard to every event which arrests our attention or awakens our interest, our first thoughts and our most anxious inquiries about it will be, how it is likely to operate in advancing or retarding the great work foretold in the passage before us. It is only in so far as it does so operate that its effects will be enduring,—and, therefore, so far is it really deserving the serious concern of creatures who are themselves destined to live through eternity.

But if we be conscious that, in regard to the events that are

occurring, and the changes that are taking place from day to day, we are satisfied with viewing them in their worldly aspect, and anxious only, or chiefly, about their bearing on the temporal concerns of ourselves and others, is there not ground to fear that we have not earnestly inquired into our own personal relation to Christ, or that we have too hastily concluded that we have an interest in his salvation now, and that we shall have a place hereafter in that house which he is building for the name of the Lord,—the spiritual temple which he is rearing to the praise of the glory of the grace of God? If we have such an interest in Christ, such a place in the great work which he is carrying on, surely it should be in some way a matter of experience with us. If we really are under the hand of the great Master-builder,—if he has indeed begun the work of fashioning and fitting us for the place which we are to occupy in his spiritual house,—it might surely be expected that we should be conscious of the change which by his Spirit he is making upon us, and that we should be sensible of making some progress towards a meetness for the honour and blessedness to which we are destined. The Scriptures furnish many tests by which we may try ourselves whether we be in Christ, and have become new creatures. But on no point are they more explicit than this, that if we are ourselves partakers of the grace of the Gospel, we shall feel anxious that others also should be partakers of the same grace,—that we shall earnestly desire to see the image of Christ reflected in our fellow-men around us,—and that we shall love that image wherever we see it so reflected. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

LXXXIII.

THE PRIESTS OF JEROBOAM.

1 KINGS XIII. 33.

THOSE who have been accustomed to read the history of Israel with attention and interest must have felt, that after passing the time of Solomon, they enter upon a very dreary period of that history. Looking to that people merely in a civil and political point of view, their rapid decline, after the period referred to, is fitted to awaken a melancholy and painful feeling, just as the history of the decline and fall of any other mighty kingdom is wont to do. Of Solomon it is recorded, not only that he made tributaries of the children of those nations of Canaan whom Israel had not destroyed, but that “he reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt,”—and that he reigned over all Israel as one great kingdom,—as, in fact, the mightiest monarchy on the earth. But scarcely had Solomon been gathered to his fathers, when we see Israel divided into two rival or rather hostile kingdoms,—Judah under Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, and Israel, comprehending ten of the tribes, under Jeroboam, whom they sent and called for, and made king over them. Of these kings we are told that there were wars between them continually; and in the subsequent history of the two kingdoms, we find them frequently engaged in active hostilities against each other, and not unfrequently calling in the aid of foreign powers, with the view of crushing their rival. And thus wasted by internal wars, and

assailed by enemies from without, their strength continued to decay, till they were at last overpowered, and dispossessed of their country,—first, Israel, by the king of Assyria, who carried them away captive, and planted colonies of heathens in their cities,—and afterwards, Judah, by the king of Babylon, who took Jerusalem, and “burnt the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house,” and carried away the people captive to Babylon.

But lamentable as was the temporal disaster which overtook these kingdoms in succession, the devout reader will see in it the consequence merely of an unspeakably more lamentable decline on the part of that infatuated people. It was not the outward splendour of Solomon’s royal estate, nor the great extent of his dominion, nor the peace which he enjoyed on every side, that constituted the true glory of his reign; neither was it in mere worldly prosperity that the chief privileges of his people consisted. The peculiar honour by which Solomon was distinguished was, that in and by him as the son and successor of David, God was pleased to perfect that system of types by which he had from the beginning set forth Christ to the faith and hope of the Church; and, consequently, the great and pre-eminent privilege which the people enjoyed under Solomon’s reign was, that then there was vouchsafed to them a clearer and a larger revelation of the person, and character, and work of Messiah, than had been granted to the Church in any former age. From the first, God was pleased to employ types of various kinds,—as persons, places, and institutions,—to unfold the plan of redemption by a suffering Saviour; and it was more in these types than in verbal descriptions that the promised Saviour was presented to the eye of God’s believing people. Whatever Abel might understand of the first promise, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent,” or however much he might feel interested in and comforted by that promise, we cannot doubt that the appointment of animal sacrifice would give him a clearer insight into the ground of a sinner’s acceptance with God,—and that the gracious manner in which his sacrifice was approved would impart to him more confidence as to his own personal acceptance than could be derived from the simple promise itself. The institution of sacrifice,—that is, of bloody

sacrifice,—was, accordingly, the standing medium of the believer's approach to God even from the beginning; and in the progress of the history of the Church, we find it continuing to occupy a more and more prominent place. In fact, the gradual revelation of Christ's work as Mediator consisted not a little in the constantly increasing prominence that was given to that institution, as the whole Mosaic economy testifies; for the main object of the ceremonial law,—that which occupied the chief place in the numerous and costly rites of that system,—was sacrifice.

Such was the care that had been taken from the beginning to set forth Christ in his priestly office: and I need not dwell on the grace and wisdom herein manifested; for every believer knows that it is on Christ's work, as the great High Priest, that the hope of the sinner rests. But the prophetical office of Christ was also set forth from the beginning, inasmuch as he was typically represented in this character by all the prophets who were employed to make known the will of God to his Church. Indeed, we are expressly told that it was "the Spirit of Christ" which was in them, and which "testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." And of Christ's prophetical office, too, a clearer revelation continued to be given: for so plainly did David typify him in that office, or rather so clearly did Christ speak in and by David, that the language employed by the prophet to foretell the Saviour's work was the very language which the Saviour himself afterwards employed while he was engaged in accomplishing that work. It was thus that David spoke in the person of Christ, when he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and he spoke also in the person of Christ, and in reference to his resurrection, when he said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." But though the system of types, whereby to set forth Christ to the faith and hope of the Church, had been employed from the beginning, and had gradually been enlarged or more fully unfolded, it was reserved for Solomon, as the son and immediate successor of David, to be honoured in bringing that system to perfection; and it is this consideration that gives the character of peculiar guiltiness to the rapid declension on the part of the people of Israel, which followed immediately on the death of Solomon, when ten of their

tribes solemnly renounced all interest in the house, not of Rehoboam, nor of Solomon, but of David, of whom it had been said that his throne should be established for ever.

I have said that God was pleased to perfect the typical system, employed for prefiguring Christ, in and by Solomon: and they who are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures cannot require any lengthened argument or illustration to prove or to explain this statement. It was on Solomon, as the son of David, that the honour was conferred of building an house for the name of the Lord,—a permanent abode for the ark of the God of Israel. When David proposed taking that honourable work on himself, God thus spoke to him, by the mouth of the prophet Nathan, “Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house, since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel, spake I a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? . . . I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover, I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”

The whole tenor of this communication intimated, that to build a permanent house for the name of the Lord was the highest honour that could be conferred on the man who was privileged to build it; and that the erection of such an house

was fitted, and graciously designed to give a permanency to the prosperity of Israel which they had never previously enjoyed,—that, in fact, if God did choose a place in any of the tribes of Israel to put his name there, and gave permission to build a dwelling-place for his glory, it was with the view of its being a new era in the history of his Church,—a period from which they might date the enjoyment of all the peculiar privileges of his chosen people as they had never yet enjoyed them. And ample provision was made for the fulfilment of this gracious promise. In the temple-service which Solomon was permitted and enabled to establish, there was given to the great typical representation of Christ's priestly office,—his atoning sacrifice, and his all-prevailing intercession,—a prominence and a solemnity, in the sight of all Israel, still more striking and impressive than even in the pure time of the Church, in the days of Moses in the wilderness, and of Joshua in Shiloh ; while, at the same time, its stability seemed to be secured, inasmuch as the ark of God was placed beyond the danger of falling into the obscurity and the neglect in which it had lain for so long a time previous to the elevation of David to the throne of Israel.

But it is not on this account alone that Solomon may be regarded as having been honoured to complete or perfect the system of types employed to prefigure Christ. It was in the person of David, as king of Israel, and in the person of Solomon, as David's son and successor in the throne, that Christ in his kingly office was most clearly and fully set forth : and thus, while the whole system of divine institutions was more fully unfolded, and made to occupy a larger and more conspicuous place than at any former period, there was given to the people of Israel, in the promises made to David and his house, a pledge of the permanency and security of all their privileges, if they did but cleave to God, and believe his word. While, in the acceptance of their sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem, they had daily renewed proofs of the efficacy of the great Atonement, to which the Church, from the beginning, was taught to look forward ; they had visible proofs also that over all their glory God had created a defence,—for the fear of them and the dread of them was upon all the nations round about : and the promise that David should never want a man to sit on his throne, was a pledge that nothing but their

own unbelief and disobedience could ever put their privileges in jeopardy.

And what a glorious prospect was thus opened up to them ! They knew then in what line to look for the long-promised Messiah,—even the family of David. They saw the throne erected which was one day to be filled by Him whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and whose dominion ruleth over all. It was impossible to conceive how any thing more could be done for them than what had been done, in order that they might fulfil all the great purposes for which God had separated them from the world, as his own peculiar people. Secure from the assaults of foreign foes, and having no longer any unsubdued enemies within their own borders, they had only to wait in peace and prosperity the coming of Messiah, not knowing how soon that glorious Prince might appear to take possession of the throne of his father David. And if they had so continued to act, what a glorious spectacle would they have exhibited in the sight of the nations around them ! And how truly would have been fulfilled God's gracious design regarding them, even that they might be unto him "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory,"—that all the nations of the earth might "fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity" that he had procured unto them. But scarcely had they been put in possession of these privileges—scarcely had these prospects been opened up to them, when they began to backslide, and, as their subsequent history proved, with a perpetual backsliding; for what is stated of their first king Jeroboam in the passage under consideration is true of them, especially of the ten tribes—that notwithstanding the solemn warnings that were addressed to them, they returned not from their evil way, until the Lord "removed them out of his sight."

Such being the aggravated nature of the apostasy of Israel, it might have been expected that they would have been left, without warning or remonstrance, to follow their own infatuated course, and to be filled with their own devices,—that it might have been said of them at the first, as it was said of them at a later period, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." But there were some, we may hope many, of God's people,—a portion of the true Church even among the ten tribes; and for their sake,

as well, no doubt, as in forbearance and mercy towards Israel at large, God did not at once and for ever cast them off. They had, as a nation, withdrawn themselves from under the government of that family,—that race of kings in which Messiah was to appear; and they had, moreover, deliberately relinquished all interest in the sacrifices and temple service at Jerusalem whereby the great Atonement was prefigured, and made available for the peace and comfort of believing worshippers, and had betaken themselves instead to the worship of Jeroboam's calves. In their national capacity, therefore, they rejected Christ in his kingly and priestly offices:—I say, in their national capacity; for we find it written that, besides the Levites whom Jeroboam had cast off from executing the priest's office unto the Lord, "such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem," "out of all the tribes of Israel," "to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers."

But though Israel had thus wilfully withdrawn themselves from those channels of communication whereby God had especially promised to convey blessings to his people, yet he was pleased to follow them in their wayward and rebellious course, and to seek, by his prophets, to bring them back from their wandering. And this gracious procedure began, as the chapter before us testifies, even from the first. While yet the idolatrous worship established by Jeroboam was comparatively a new thing, and ere the people had become enslaved to it by long-continued practice, a prophet was sent to warn Jeroboam and his people of the ruin and disgrace in which the course that they were following would ultimately terminate. And every circumstance connected with the prophet's mission was alike solemn, significant, and instructive. He was sent out of Judah, as if to intimate that God did, in an especial manner, dwell there, and that Israel had forsaken him. When he came to Bethel, where he found Jeroboam standing by one of his newly-built altars to burn incense, he addressed his message, not to Jeroboam, neither to the people, but to the altar,—predicting what a dishonoured thing it would one day be, when the bones of the very priests who had ministered there should be burned upon it,—a most emphatic prediction of the disgrace and shame which would ultimately overtake all who were implicated in that idolatry. And, farther, he foretold that

it was a child to be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, who was to execute this divine judgment on the idolatrous system of Israel,—a child of that very family from which they had revolted,—a sovereign of the very race which they had abjured, saying, “What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse.”

And how alarming should such a prediction have been to those who had uttered, or who had adopted, the impious sentiment expressed on the same occasion, and implying something like triumph in the anticipated downfall of David’s throne, “Now see to thine own house, David!” Nor were Jeroboam and Israel left without the most unequivocal evidence of the divine authority by which this threatening had been pronounced; for the prophet, without waiting for a demand to produce his credentials, proceeded to give them a sign or demonstration of the truth of his prophesying, by declaring, that, even then, at that moment, the altar should be rent, and the ashes upon it poured out. Jeroboam, indeed, stung to madness by the holy boldness of the prophet, put forth his hand from the altar, where he had been burning incense, and said, “Lay hold on him.” But he only showed thereby his own utter impotence. None appear to have had courage to lay hold of God’s prophet; but the king’s own arm was arrested, withered, and shrunk in the position into which he had dared to raise it in defiance of the God of Israel: and the haughty king, in the presence of all his duped and deceived people, was compelled to become an humble suppliant of the Lord’s prophet, imploring him to entreat “the face of the Lord” his God, and to pray for him, that his hand might be restored to him again. “And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored him again, and became as it was before.”

It might seem almost incredible that Israel could fail to be convinced, after witnessing these transactions, that they had turned away from God, and had entered on a course that was to terminate in irretrievable ruin. The altar erected to their calves had been shivered to fragments, while the incense was yet smoking upon it; but the gods whom they served put forth no power to prevent, or to revenge the insult that had been offered to them. Nay, Jeroboam himself was compelled to

acknowledge that he had no confidence in his calves; for he besought the prophet to pray to the Lord, his (the prophet's) God, that his arm might be restored. And if Jeroboam had contrived to persuade the people of Israel that his images were not idols, but mere symbols or pictures, whereby to help their devotions in worshipping the true God, the God of their fathers, as modern idolaters allege of their images, then the prediction of the prophet, and the scene that followed it, did as clearly refute that plea; for Jeroboam's rent altar and withered arm bore incontrovertible evidence to the falsehood of his pretension, and proclaimed, as by a voice from heaven, that he had sinned, and had "made Israel to sin." But, though it may appear inconceivable how, after such an alarming and humbling exposure, Jeroboam could venture to attempt to blindfold Israel, or how Israel could allow themselves to be any longer blindfolded; yet the passage under consideration tells us that Jeroboam continued to practise his former arts of deceiving; and the subsequent history shows that Israel continued to be deceived.

But there are events recorded in this same chapter which seem to afford some explanation of the encouragement which Jeroboam had to persevere in his ungodly course, and of the success with which his perseverance was crowned. I refer to the transactions which took place between the prophet who had pronounced judgment on Jeroboam's altar, and a person who is called an old prophet, who dwelt at Bethel. It is a question among commentators whether that person was a true or a false prophet. I think he was a false prophet; for he declared that the mouth of the Lord had spoken what the Lord did not speak. He did, indeed, afterwards prophecy and speak, not only what was true, but what God commanded, or rather compelled him to speak. But, like Balaam, he spoke to his own infamy and confusion, being obliged to declare himself a liar. But whatever he was before, or whatever he afterwards became, he was a false prophet on the occasion here specially spoken of, when he persuaded the prophet who had come from Judah to disobey the commandment of the Lord, by eating and drinking in the place where he was forbidden to eat or to drink,—a commandment to which he had adhered in spite of all the courtesy and condescension of Jeroboam himself. The consequence of this act of disobedience into

which he was drawn by the impious lie of the old prophet, was that he was visited with the righteous judgment of God. "A lion met him by the way, and slew him."

And what, may we suppose, would be the effect of this melancholy event on Jeroboam and his people? Might it not encourage, or rather, would it not certainly encourage them to conclude that he who had met so miserable a death was not, and could not be, a true prophet? And was not Jeroboam ingenious enough to devise arguments, whereby to explain away the events which might, at the time, terrify Israel, and perhaps awaken some misgivings in his own mind, and to convince both them and himself that they had nothing to fear from the denunciations of one who died under the immediate visitation of God's judgment? One of the most eminent, and most generally known of the Jewish historians—I mean Josephus—in his epitome, or version I may almost call it, of Old Testament history, has a chapter on the subject before us, in which he says that the prophet who was sent against the altar of Jeroboam was Iddo, and that the old prophet who seduced him into a disobedience of the divine commandment, did so for the express purpose of bringing him under the displeasure of God, and thereby effacing the salutary impression which his prediction might have made on the mind of Jeroboam and the people. Of course, this opinion of Josephus, which must have been a current opinion among the Jews, is not confirmed by Scripture. But neither is it contradicted by anything in the Bible, while we do certainly find it recorded that "Iddo the seer" had visions "against Jeroboam the son of Nebat." At all events, we can hardly doubt that the judgment with which the disobedient prophet was visited would tend to dispel the fears, and to revive the courage of Jeroboam and his idolatrous people; and that thus the first salutary impression produced on backsliding Israel, by a prophet of the Lord, was counteracted, in regard, at least, to the great mass of the people, by the devices of a lying prophet,—a melancholy presage, an ominous intimation of what the future history of Israel showed—namely, that false prophesying would prove their ruin: for that which did, in an especial manner, render ineffectual the warnings of the true prophets, and hardened Israel in their ungodly courses, was the prophesying of false prophets. "The prophets pro-

phesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

The history which we have been reviewing is pregnant with instruction,—but so plain, and of so easy application, as not to require any lengthened illustration. It shows us very clearly the natural progress and consequences of error,—the process which the apostle emphatically describes, when he speaks of the heart being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Israel began by rebelling against Christ as their king when they revolted from the family and throne of David,—that family from which it was declared that Messiah was to spring, and that throne on which Messiah was to sit and reign. They rejected him from reigning over them, and they sought another head, even Jeroboam. And in doing so, they virtually declared also that they could dispense with Christ's priestly office as set forth and applied through the sacrifices offered on Mount Zion, the place which God had chosen to put his name there. But while they did thus reject Christ in his kingly and priestly offices, he did not at once forsake and give them up. He still addressed them in his prophetical office. He sent his servant the prophet to denounce their sin, and to warn them of the consequences. But they listened to the false prophet, and refused to return.

And so it will always be, as it has always been. The offices of Christ will be recognised or rejected together. A professedly Christian community cannot disown any one of his offices without being led to disown the others also. If his authority as the Head of his Church, as King of nations, and King of saints, be in any degree compromised or set aside, his offices as Priest and Prophet of his Church will not be long maintained in all their fulness. This is the natural tendency of error. But there is more than this. Men have reason to fear that the divine influence of the Spirit will be withheld,—that, having sinned against their light, and, it may be, their convictions, on one portion of divine truth, they will be less clear in apprehending other portions of the same truth,—nay, that they may be given up to strong delusion to believe a lie. Illustrations of these remarks may be found in abundance in the history of the Church. And such a withdrawal of the Spirit, as

the history before us testifies, is the forerunner of coming judgment. It is, indeed, itself a most appalling judgment ; for it is a very fearful thing to be left under the influence of the great deceiver—the enemy of souls. But this will be followed by other judgments, in which even the true Church, those who cleave to Christ in all the fulness of his mediatorial offices, will have their share.

So it was with the true Israel of old. No doubt, the warning and threatening of the prophet who was sent against the altar of Jeroboam, as well as those of the true prophets who followed him, did awaken in the minds of true believers in Israel a holy jealousy of themselves, and did serve to strengthen them to withstand the idolatry which prevailed around them. But how manifold and severe must have been their trials amidst the prevailing ungodliness, the abounding iniquity of their country ! The main subject of every message which every succeeding prophet brought to them, was a message of judgment,—a burden of lamentation and woe ; and how could they tell how largely they were to participate in the calamities that were coming on their land ? It is true that the severest of these threatenings were accompanied with assurances that God had not forgotten his covenant which he swore to his servant Abraham, and that he would yet visit and redeem his people, and raise up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David. It is also true that these assurances were expressly designed for the true Israel,—those who did still cleave to the God of their fathers,—the comparatively small number who never bowed the knee to Baal. And what would the little flock have done, had it not been for these reviving and refreshing promises which were, ever and anon, mingled up with the series of awful threatenings which prophet after prophet was commissioned to denounce against backsliding Israel ? But for these promises, how could their faith and hope have been kept alive during many ages of growing degeneracy, while Israel as a nation were ripening for judgment ? But with all this, we can easily conceive what they must have endured while contemplating the growing ungodliness of their country, and the accumulating intimations of God's coming judgments,—conscious that they themselves had added, by their own sins, to the amount

of national guilt. And must it not be so with believers still? While they see the spirit of error contending bitterly with the spirit of truth,—while they see Christ in all his offices openly denied and rejected by multitudes,—and while they discern signs and intimations of his coming judgments; must it not be a subject of solemn and serious concern with them, how far their sins have increased the amount of national guilt? And must they not be earnestly seeking to make sure of having a chamber into which they may enter, and where they may hide themselves till the calamities be overpast?

LXXXIV.

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD SHUT UP.

2 CHRONICLES XXVIII. 24, 25.

THE reign of Ahaz, which extended to sixteen years, was a very melancholy period in the history of the kingdom of Judah. He was not, indeed, the only king of David's line who did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. But his backsliding was of such a kind, and manifested itself in such a way as to be more disastrous to the kingdom, than that of any of the kings who had preceded him ; and the passage before us describes a state of things which must have been peculiarly discouraging to the people of God—those who constituted the true Church. Of the previous history of the kingdom of Judah, as distinguished from the ten tribes, or the kingdom of Israel, the period at which the prospects of the true Church were the darkest, was, perhaps, the six years during which the government was usurped by the wicked Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the most wicked of all the kings of Israel, and the mother of Ahaziah the king of Judah. On the death of her son, whose counsellor she had been to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, she cut off, as she supposed, all his children, the legitimate heirs of the crown, and built a temple to Baal, and succeeded in gaining over, not only the princes or leading men, but a great proportion of the people, to idolatry, and, to all appearance, had well-nigh extinguished the true religion in the land. But even during that dark period, we do not find that she had ventured

so far as to "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord." On the contrary, it appears that Jehoiada the priest was permitted to dwell within the precincts of the temple, and to minister in the priest's office on behalf of the few in Judah and in Israel who might still adhere to the worship of the true God. We find, moreover, that the same holy man was not only enabled to rescue Joash, the king's youngest son, from the massacre by Athaliah of the seed royal, and to place him upon the throne, but was honoured also to be the instrument of a great and glorious reformation, the blessed effects of which were long felt. Joash, indeed, after the death of Jehoiada, was drawn into idolatry, and when reproved for his backsliding, he slew the son of his preserver and benefactor, and brought wrath and judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. In like manner did his son and successor, Amaziah, trespass, and bring great calamity on the kingdom; for though, at the commencement of his reign, he did, in some respects, do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet, with a strange infatuation, he brought home with him the gods or idols of the children of Seir, after vanquishing that people in battle, "and bowed down himself before them, and burnt incense unto them;" and in the spirit of his father he thus addressed the prophet who reproved him for his guilt and folly, "Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten?"

But while the kings of Judah did thus fall into idolatry, carrying with them, it is to be feared, many of the leading men, and multitudes of the people, and so brought wrath upon the land, yet the Church, the true Israel, God's believing people, continued to enjoy the ordinances of his grace, in having access to the temple service, and thereby finding access to God himself, and acceptance with him. It would appear that, amidst all these backslidings, there were faithful men in the priesthood, who maintained in purity and integrity the service of God's house; and of this we have a striking example in the history of Uzziah or Azariah, the son and successor of Amaziah. That king began his reign by doing "that which was right in the sight of the Lord," taking counsel of Zechariah, "who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." "And his name," we are

told, "spread far abroad ; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction : for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." This profanation of God's ordinance,—this violation of the order of his house, though perpetrated by the highest civil authority, the priests had the fidelity and the courage to resist ; for "Azariah the priest went in after the king, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men ; and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense : go out of the sanctuary ; for thou hast trespassed : neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God." The king was wroth ; but the priests were steadfast ; and God himself interposed to vindicate their fidelity. While Uzziah "was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead, . . . and Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence ; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper ; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord." A visitation so striking and so severe could not fail to fill every devout mind with solemn awe. But how largely also must it have ministered to the consolation of believers, as furnishing a most emphatic assurance that God had not yet forsaken the place which he had chosen to put his name there,—that he still watched over, and owned, and continued to bless his own ordinance ! And whatever, therefore, might be the public calamities which, from time to time, overtook the nation because of their backsliding, the true people of God, though sharing in these calamities, could, amidst them all, still rejoice, because it was still said to them, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

It thus appears that, up to this period, the Church had enjoyed in purity, and with some measure of freedom, the best and richest of her privileges—that of waiting on God in the place where he had especially promised to meet with, and to bless his people. And so, we have reason to believe, it continued to be

during the reign of Jotham, the son and successor of Uzziah ; for of him it is recorded, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." But a very different prospect begins to open upon us with the reign of his son Ahaz, terminating in the lamentable state of things described in the verses we are considering. From the first, he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord ; for "he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover, he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also, and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree." Nothing worse, I believe, than this list of atrocities could have been brought against even the most wicked of the kings of Israel. Of course, he would be countenanced and encouraged in all these abominations by his courtiers and many of the people, as wicked kings usually were ; and the consequence was what the whole history of Israel might have taught him to expect. He was delivered into the hand of the king of Syria, and also into the hand of the king of Israel, by both of whom Judah was smitten with a great slaughter. The Edomites also came and smote Judah, "and carried away captives ;" and "the Philistines . . . invaded the cities of the low country," and took them and the villages thereof, and "dwelt there. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz, . . . for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord." Even the King of Assyria, to whom Ahaz applied for help, "distressed him, but strengthened him not ;" for though Ahaz hired him "with a portion out of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes;" yet "he helped him not." Nor was there, notwithstanding all these disasters, any thing like even a temporary humbling of himself on the part of Ahaz. On the contrary, "in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord . . . For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him ; and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me : but they were the ruin of him and of all Israel." These, of course, were national calamities, such as never failed to follow on national backsliding and sin.

But I would advert especially to those parts of his policy and conduct which went more directly to affect the interests and privileges of the true people of God. And of this kind was his conduct as related in the 16th chapter of 2 Kings, where some particulars are recorded concerning Ahaz which we do not find in the chapter before us. We are there told that the king of Assyria, in consequence of the treasure which Ahaz had sent him, came up, and took the city of Damascus out of the hand of the king of Syria, by whom Ahaz had been oppressed ; and that Ahaz went down to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria, no doubt to congratulate and to thank him. While there, he saw an altar, an idolatrous one, of course, and he sent home "to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof." His purpose in doing so was, that Urijah should forthwith have an altar made after the same fashion, that it might be placed in the house of the Lord ; the brazen altar which Solomon had made being removed to make room for it. Had Urijah and his fellows been as faithful and valiant for the truth, as were the high priest Azariah and his brethren in the time of Uzziah, they would have resisted, and with God's help might have resisted successfully, this daring outrage on the sanctity of God's house,—this presumptuous act of rebellion against God's authority. But corruption had infected the priesthood itself,—a fearful indication of coming calamity to the Church.

It would appear that Urijah had no scruples,—nay, that he was forward to execute the king's command ; for he "built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus:" so he "made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar ; and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon. And he burnt his burnt-offering and his meat-offering, and poured his drink-offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace-offerings, upon the altar." He removed "also the brazen altar, which was before the Lord, from the fore-front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north-side of the altar,"—that is, he put it out of the way. And upon his own altar, he commanded Urijah to offer all the offerings ; and Urijah the priest did "according to all that king Ahaz

commanded." It is farther stated of Ahaz, that he made great havoc of other parts of the furniture of the temple, and of the king's entry to it, in order to please the king of Assyria; and there can be no doubt that, in the very sacrifices which he offered on his new altar in the house of the Lord, he was doing homage to the gods of Syria,—the people who had vanquished him,—according to his own declaration: "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." And having thus introduced idolatry into the very temple itself, the dwelling-place of Jehovah,—and having done so with the concurrence, and even the co-operation of the high priest himself; we cannot wonder if, in the progressive accumulation of his difficulties, when he needed all that was valuable within his reach to pay his heathen allies, or to pay off his victorious enemies, Ahaz should gather together "the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God;" and that, after thus rendering it unfit for the solemn services which were wont to be performed there, he should, in the bitterness of his enmity against every thing connected with the holy worship of Jehovah, altogether "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord."

And what, then, was to become of the Church—the true Israel—the tens, or hundreds, or thousands whom God had reserved for himself, and who had not bowed the knee to any of the innumerable idols which their apostate and infatuated king brought in and worshipped, and which he had stealthily at least, under the cover of his new altar, made to usurp the very house of God? It is difficult for us to conceive, into what perplexity and amazement true believers in Jerusalem and Judah must have been thrown by the stunning intelligence that the king, after having squandered the treasures of the house of the Lord, broken in pieces its sacred vessels, and otherwise marred its glory and its beauty, had finally shut up the doors thereof. It was like cutting them off from communion with God. It was to exclude them from the place where especially, and, indeed, as they would be ready at that moment to conclude, where alone their persons and services could be presented with acceptance before him. It was like putting an end to those atoning sacrifices by which their conscience was, from time to time, relieved of the

burden of guilt which lay upon it. And feelings, therefore, would be awakened in their minds similar to those which a believer now would experience, if for a season he should lose sight of the foundation of his hope,—if the doctrine of justification through faith in the blood of Christ alone should be so perverted, so overborne by error, as no longer to appear to his bewildered mind what he had once felt it to be, glad tidings of great joy to the guilty. It was in the temple service, in the burnt-offerings which were laid upon the altar there, that the Old Testament Church had the clearest revelation which had been vouchsafed to her of Christ and his great salvation; and, therefore, to be shut out from these was like being separated from Christ.

And what were all their temporal calamities compared with this? With temporal calamities they were all familiar: for, in common with their countrymen at large, even the backsliding and idolatrous, they shared in the judgments which from time to time had come upon the land because of sin. But under all these, they had abundant consolation and support in being permitted to go up to the house of the Lord to spread out their anxieties and wants before him, and there to receive, in the acceptance of their offerings, a new token of his forgiveness and favour. This privilege, however, was now withdrawn, and at a time, too, when the nation was suffering as it had never before suffered: "For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord." Nor was this, in all probability, the only aggravation of the spiritual calamity which had overtaken them. There is but too much reason, I think, to fear, that God's own people, as well as the priests, had been influenced for evil by the degeneracy of the times,—that they had looked with too much indifference on the innovations which Ahaz had introduced, no doubt under the pretext of adding to the solemnity of the temple worship itself,—and had thus ceased to feel that holy and most wholesome jealousy of idolatry which it behoved them at all times to cherish. And if they were awakened to a sense of their indifference, their culpable want of zeal for the glory and supremacy of Jehovah, only when they witnessed the apparent triumph of idolatry in the shutting up of the doors of the house of God, and in the erection, "in every several city of Judah," of

“high places” whereon “to burn incense unto other gods,”—nay, the erection of “altars in every corner of Jerusalem,”—how must it have aggravated the bitterness of their privation, that they had thus virtually countenanced and encouraged idolatry!

And may not God’s professing people now draw, from this view of the subject before us, very salutary instruction,—perhaps a very solemn warning? For is there no danger, in these days, that they who have been instructed in the truths of the Gospel, and profess to hold these truths as the only ground of a sinner’s hope, may be found virtually countenancing and abetting a system as contrary to the Gospel of Christ as the idolatry of Ahaz was to the worship of Jehovah? Idolatrous worship is not an unknown thing among us;—it is becoming every day more common,—and every day is it obtruded more boldly, and with every accompaniment that is fitted to render it attractive, not only to the carnal and worldly-minded, but even to those who profess some measure of piety,—that sentimental piety which feeds on excitement, on any thing which, under the garb of religion, pleases the eye or gratifies the taste. And is not this idolatry receiving increasing countenance and encouragement from those, and from many others, who must know, and who, indeed, profess to believe, that it is idolatry, and that the exhibitions which they think themselves justified in witnessing are designed to inculcate, and do inculcate in a very effective manner, doctrines the most dishonouring to Christ, and ruinous to the souls of men? Nay, are not the most unscriptural and offensive of Popish ceremonies sometimes spoken of, even by those who professedly hold Popery to be antichristian, as very imposing, very solemn, and very much fitted to awaken what they call devotional feeling?

So, I doubt not, did Ahaz speak of the gorgeous altar which he borrowed from the idolatrous temple in Damascus; and so would the multitude speak who were pleased with his imposing but impious innovation; and so would some, perhaps, who would have shrunk from the thought of countenancing idolatry. But it was idolatry still; and they were lending to it countenance and encouragement. And so, in these times, many may be abetting Popery who little dream of doing so; because, having given way to a sinful indifference to its abominations, they become unconscious of the extent to which they may, in various

ways, be contributing to its advancement. And what if the punishment of this indifference and defection on the part of the Church should be, that Popery is permitted to gain the ascendancy where the guilt of such defection has been incurred? Some may be less alarmed by such a prospect than they would be by a threatening of temporal calamities. But let none such delude themselves with vain hopes. The Word of God, illustrated by the experience of ages, has made it infallibly certain that the worst of temporal evils will follow triumphant Popery; and it is surely enough to awaken God's people from their indifference to know, as they must know and believe, that the Papacy will be satisfied with nothing less than the supremacy,—and that, not content with introducing its own idolatry where Christian truth is now taught, and where Christian worship is now practised, it would altogether “shut up the doors of the house of the Lord.”

It was to this lamentable condition that the Church was brought by the idolatry of Ahaz, the defection of a servile priesthood, and, as there is reason, I think, to fear, by the coldness and indifference of the people of God themselves. And if it was so, the privation to which they were subjected would be the more painful, at the same time that they would acknowledge that God's dealings with them were just and right. But the consequences of that state of things which Ahaz had brought about extended much farther than to the people of God of that time. The prospect to the Church of all future times was dark and gloomy; for if the temple service, that which exhibited Christ and the way of acceptance through him more fully than he had otherwise been revealed,—if this service was to be at an end, what was to keep alive the faith and hope of the Church during the period that might elapse—and it proved a long period—before Christ actually appeared? It is true, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, opened again the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired the house, and re-established the service thereof. But his son Manasseh did, in his turn, far exceed his grandfather Ahaz in his outrageous profanation of God's house; for “he built altars in the house of the Lord,” even “altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord,” “and he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this

house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever." It is plain, therefore, that from the time of Ahaz, the house of God was not what it had been before. Idolatry had once got footing in it, and, though at times expelled, was ever ready to return, and to obscure, even to the eye of true worshippers, the glory of Christ which once shone there.

And what, then, was to become of the Church, if the light of that glory should be utterly quenched, as there was reason to fear it would at no distant period be? The prospect was indeed a very gloomy one; but the darkness served to display in greater brightness the grace and faithfulness of God. In his divine wisdom and mercy, he had made provision for keeping alive the faith and hope of his Church in the promised Saviour; for at the very time when the temple was about to cease typically to represent Christ in all the fulness of his mediatorial work, there began to appear those prophets, whose predictions were destined to form part of the canon of Scripture, and whose writings are full of the sufferings of Christ and of the glory that was to follow. Among the first of these was Isaiah, who began to prophesy in the reign of Uzziah,—the king, as we have already seen, who attempted, though unsuccessfully and to his own shame, to make an inroad on the purity and integrity of the ordinances of God, by going into the temple to burn incense. There had been many prophets before the time of Hosea, Isaiah, and the others whose writings form part of the sacred volume. But of these prophets, as Elijah and Elisha, we have no writings; nor has any thing of what they taught come down to us, except what is introduced in the notices given of them in the history of Judah and Israel. From these, however, it would appear that their commission was not directly to prophesy of Christ. The great question in their time was, whether Jehovah or Baal was God; and their main work was to assert and vindicate the supremacy of Jehovah. And more was not necessary; for they who really believed in the true God, and were anxious to worship him with acceptance, would assuredly seek to Jerusalem, the place which God had chosen to put his name there,—and the place, moreover, where was permanently exhibited the clearest and most significant type of the promised Saviour. Even those in Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes, whom Elijah and Elisha might

be instrumental in rescuing or preserving from idolatry, would without fail go up to Jerusalem when it was in their power to do so; and this would often be in their power, inasmuch as there was often amity between the kings of Judah and Israel. But even when circumstances were otherwise,—when they were not permitted to leave their own kingdom, and to go up to Jerusalem,—they could, like Daniel at a future period, and at a still greater distance from Jerusalem, pray “toward the city” which God had chosen, and “toward the house” which had been built for his name, believing that God would hear from heaven his dwelling-place “their prayer and their supplications.” It was not, therefore, the immediate work of the prophets who lived and taught previously to the time of Uzziah or Ahaz to testify directly of Christ. But when idolatrous kings, and time-serving priests, and a backsliding people, combined to extinguish the light which had been set up in Jerusalem, it was needful that light should be made to spring up from another quarter, if the true Church of God was to be preserved from almost utter darkness. And if this light was to emanate from the prophets, then it was necessary that they should speak more fully of Christ than any who had gone before, and, moreover, that their prophecies should be preserved for the benefit of successive generations.

And all this God was graciously pleased to provide for; and, in illustration of this remark, I need only refer to the prophet Isaiah. That prophet was raised up, as we have seen, during the reign of Uzziah, as if to be ready to preserve from sinking into darkness and despair the remnant of the true Israel, when about to be deprived of their best privilege, the source of their purest consolation; and his writings bear witness how large were the communications vouchsafed to him on behalf of God’s afflicted and downcast people. Isaiah admonished, rebuked, and warned, as did all the prophets who had gone before him. But that which occupies the most prominent place in his writings is Christ: and I need hardly remark, that so full, so clear, and so minute, are his predictions respecting the incarnation, the sufferings, the death, and exaltation of Messiah, and the glory of his kingdom, that they sometimes appear rather as the history of what he had actually witnessed, than a prophetic intimation of what was still seven hundred years distant. He has, with great truth and propriety, been called the “Evangelical prophet.” He was not

alone, however, in the great work to which he was specially called, inasmuch as others also of his own and of later times did, by the Holy Spirit, testify beforehand "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." We have here, then, one among many instances of God's gracious interposition on behalf of his Church at critical periods of her history. The king, the priests, and the people had become unfaithful to the most sacred and the most honourable trust that had ever been committed to the children of men. They had been appointed the guardians or keepers of an institution where God had taken up his special abode in the midst of them, and where he had laid open to them a way of approach with acceptance to himself. But they had brought idolatry into the very precincts of the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory; and they had at last shut up the doors of the house of the Lord,—thus doing what they could to obliterate every trace of that great typical system whereby for many ages Christ had been set forth to the faith and hope of his Church. But amidst this faithlessness and melancholy infatuation of his professing people, God manifested himself as the faithful and covenant-keeping God; and for the sake of the faithful remnant of that time, and of the faithful in subsequent times, he made provision that, through his servants the prophets, Christ should still be held forth to the faith and hope of the guilty. And so God will continue to manifest himself; for he still is and ever will be the faithful and covenant-keeping God; and however unfaithful his professing people may be to the honourable trust committed to them,—that of being instrumental in advancing the Redeemer's kingdom,—he will raise up other instruments for accomplishing his purposes. But what is the condition of those who prove unfaithful, and whose work is transferred to others because they refused to do it? What is their condition in the sight of God? They have not defeated God's purposes, it may be said. True; they have not defeated God's purposes: that they could not do. But have they incurred nothing of the guilt of doing so? If God's purposes had depended upon them, would they not have been defeated? It is a very solemn saying of the Saviour, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

LXXXV.

JOSIAH.

2 KINGS XXIII 25.

THE ground of the high character here given of Josiah is fully explained by what is related of him in this and the preceding chapter, as well as in the parallel chapters of the second Book of Chronicles. He came to the throne at the age of eight years, having succeeded his father Amon, who, after a reign of two years, was murdered by his own servants. Amon was the son of Manasseh, and during the two years that he reigned, "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, . . . and sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them ; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself : but Amon trespassed more and more." There can be little doubt, then, that at the end even of that short period of two years, the reformation which took place in the latter years of Manasseh's reign had been followed, as in other cases, by the falling away of many, perhaps of the people generally. And if so, it serves to bring out more fully to view the marvellous grace of God as manifested in the character of Josiah. We are warranted, I think, to believe of him, that even from his earliest years his heart was tender, and there was found in him "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel : " for it is said of him generally, and as if it were applicable to his whole reign, that " he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." Certain it is, that " in the eighth

year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images."

Having entered on this godly enterprise, he prosecuted it with untiring perseverance, and God was pleased to honour him with remarkable success. For six years he laboured to destroy every memorial of idolatry which was to be found, not only in Jerusalem and Judah, but also in Israel, where, after the captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria, there were still some of the people, the remnant that were not carried away, mixed with the heathen whom the king of Assyria had planted in the cities of Samaria. And not only did he break down "the altars of Baalim," and cut down "the images that were on high above them," and break in pieces "the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images;" but he poured such contempt upon these monuments of idolatry as was fitted to cover with shame and confusion those who had been so weak or so wicked as to place their confidence in dumb idols. After reducing these idols to dust, he strowed the dust "upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them;" and, moreover, as the strongest mark of contempt, and that which, in the opinion of the Jews, left indelible pollution, "he burned the bones of the priests upon their altars."

And in connection with this part of his work of reformation, there is one transaction too remarkable to be passed over without special notice. I refer to what he did to the altar and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat had made at Bethel, where, immediately after the revolt of the ten tribes, Jeroboam set up his golden calf, saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." It will be recollected, that while Jeroboam stood by the idolatrous altar which he had reared to burn incense, a man of God out of Judah came, and "cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." And accordingly, after the lapse of three hundred and fifty years, we

are told in the passage before us, that Josiah executed to the very letter all that had thus been foretold: for "the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place.... he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove." And "he sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres that were there,"—excepting the bones of the prophet who had pronounced the doom on Jeroboam's altar,—and he burned the bones "upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words." "And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem."

But while Josiah did thus abolish every memorial of idolatry, not only in Jerusalem and Judah, but also in Israel, he was only preparing the way for that reformation on which his heart was set. At the same time that he set about destroying the altars and the images which his father and others of his predecessors had set up, he gave instructions for receiving the contributions of the people for repairing the house of the Lord, and for re-establishing the ordinances thereof in something like the magnificence and splendour of former and better days. And in this he was as successful as he was in overthrowing the altars of idolatry. God put it into the hearts of the people to give largely, and of the workmen to deal faithfully; so the house of the Lord was repaired. This, indeed, may appear to have been nothing more than what was done by Hezekiah, or even by Manasseh himself during the latter years of his reign. But there was one circumstance which distinguished the reformation under Josiah from all those that preceded it. While preparations were made, as we have seen, for repairing the temple, Hilkiab the priest, we are told, found there "the book of the law" of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiab delivered the book to Shaphan the scribe, and Shaphan carried it to the king, and read it before the king. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes," and commanded Hilkiab and others, saying, "Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel, and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have

not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in thisbook."

It would appear from this, that the book of the law had for some time been not only neglected, but altogether forgotten. Even Hilkiah the priest, as well as Shaphan the scribe, spoke of its being found, as they might have been supposed to speak of the discovery of a lost thing; and the deep distress into which the king was thrown when the book was read to him showed how little he had previously known of what it contained. They could not, indeed, be utterly ignorant of all that was enjoined by the law; for besides that so long as the temple stood, they could not forget altogether the purpose for which it had been erected, and the services which were to be offered there to the God of Israel as the only living and true God;—besides this, there had never been wanting, even in the worst times, living witnesses for God and for his truth in Jerusalem and in Judah. It is probable, too, that portions of the law were to be found in the hands of the Levites, whose duty it was to instruct the people throughout the cities of Judah; and in this way, enough might be known of the divine institutions, as appointed by Moses, to enable such as were so inclined to observe these ordinances in something like the prescribed manner. But, with all this, it is plain that the book of the law, as a whole, had long been neglected and forgotten. Neither had that law been read to the people at least every seventh year, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, as had been expressly commanded; nor had the kings been careful to observe the injunction laid upon them, when it was said, "It shall be, when the king sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them."

No wonder that Josiah, when he heard these words, should have been filled with dismay, and still more when the whole book of the law was read in his hearing: for he could not fail to discover that, notwithstanding the occasional revivals that had taken place, the nation on the whole had been advancing in a downward course of backsliding. The very neglect with which the book of the law

had been treated, was not only an indication of a great falling away on the part of kings, and princes, and priests, and people, but was itself a grievous sin; and Josiah felt it to be so. He saw, also, as none for a long time before him had seen, the necessity, not only of turning from the idolatry wherewith Judah had provoked the Lord to anger, but of humbling themselves before God on account of many other shortcomings and sins which the newly discovered law brought to light, but which they had never thought of. And, accordingly, when Josiah prepared to keep the feast of the passover,—that feast which never failed to occupy a prominent place in all the revivals that took place in Judah,—he proceeded to make his preparations, and to intimate his purpose to the people, with a solemnity which we do not find observed by his predecessors who were honoured to bring about reformations. For “the king,” we are told, “went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book: and all the people stood to the covenant.” And after this solemn and deliberate act of covenanting, “the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.” And it is added by the sacred historian, “Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem.”

The reformation which Josiah was honoured to bring about was thus declared to have been the most remarkable of any which the history of Judah has recorded. And it was assuredly a very remarkable one, as illustrating the divine forbearance towards the nation at large, as well as the divine love and faithfulness towards the Church. With regard to the nation at

large, their preceding history afforded but too much reason to fear that they were still in a state of revolt and apostacy from God, and that any thing like a real and permanent return to their allegiance was utterly hopeless. They had, indeed, from time to time professedly returned to God, and on such occasions he had never failed to visit them with a return of peace and prosperity. But if for a season they seemed to be convinced of the guilt as well as the folly of idolatry, it was only to return to it with more eagerness than ever, and by a new apostacy to aggravate the guilt of all their former revolts. A godly king had at various times been raised up, in circumstances the most remarkable, and when such an one could have been least expected; and, by his instrumentality, their downward course to ruin had been arrested, or at least for a time retarded. But on his removal, they showed how little they had valued the blessing which had been sent them, or really profited by the reformation which he had brought about; for if his successor was ungodly, he had no difficulty in drawing them into a participation in his grossest abominations.

After revolts, then, so many, and so aggravated by a constant accumulation of guilt, it was assuredly a marvellous manifestation of compassion and forbearance, that God did again send them a king who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and sent him, too, so quickly after they had begun to fall away from the reformation which had been wrought during the latter years of Manasseh's reign. Amon, the son and successor of Manasseh, did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and laboured to undo all the good and to revive all the evil which his father had done. But his influence and example operated only for the short period of two years, when he was succeeded by Josiah, in whose personal character and public conduct there was every thing fitted to make a deep impression on the nation at large. So much zeal in one so young could hardly fail to arrest their attention, and fix their thoughts on the great truth,—the supremacy of God,—which he was raised up to testify for and to vindicate. But he was honoured also with a special commission, in the discharge of which the sovereignty of God was very strikingly manifested. He executed, as we have seen, on the altar which Jeroboam built in Bethel, a judgment which

had been pronounced upon it by a man of God more than three hundred years before, and in which Josiah was foretold by name as the person by whom the prediction was to be fulfilled. It was hardly possible for the people of Jerusalem and Judah to avoid seeing in this a very impressive demonstration of the infinite wisdom and power of God, and an undeniable proof also of the divine authority under which Josiah acted. It is probable, indeed, that the prediction which the man of God uttered against Jeroboam's altar had been long forgotten in Jerusalem and Judah, or remembered only as a tale or legend which was never expected to be fulfilled. But when the time came at which Josiah was to execute the commission that had been appointed for him ages before he was born, care was taken, by the providence of God, in the very execution of it, to revive the history of the original prediction; inasmuch as the attention of Josiah and of those who were with him was specially drawn to the sepulchre of the prophet by whom the judgment had been pronounced, and who, from a strange combination of events, had been buried in that neighbourhood, though he belonged not to Israel, but to Judah.

The whole transaction, then, was fitted to convey a very deep impression of the sovereignty of God, of his perfect foreknowledge of all events, and of his almighty power in overruling them all, even through a succession of ages, to the accomplishment of his purposes. And with this, it was fitted to convey also to the men of Jerusalem and Judah,—the nation at large,—a very solemn warning that the threatened judgments of God are not affected by the lapse of time,—that though men may forget them, they are not forgotten by him who commanded them to be denounced,—and that after an interval of many generations, the Word of God, which spoke of calamity and suffering, is as powerful and as effective for the infliction of that calamity as it was on the day on which it was uttered. They witnessed the fulfilment to the very letter of a threatening which had been denounced three hundred and fifty years before, and which they had, perhaps, never once thought of. Was it possible that they could help thinking of threatenings far more recent,—threatenings addressed to themselves, when, in the time of Manasseh, the Lord sent prophets, saying, "Behold, I am bringing such

evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle?" But all this was rendered still more solemn by another providential interposition. The book of the law,—that long unheeded, at least, if not forgotten book,—was discovered and put into the hand of Josiah, and he read it to "all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, . . . and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great." If they listened at all to that book, they must have perceived that Moses had described, with the most alarming accuracy, the very backslidings and sins with which they were chargeable; and they must have perceived also that the severest language in which the prophets of their own time addressed them, was but a repetition of what Moses had from the beginning employed in foretelling the judgments which would infallibly overtake them in the event of their forgetting and forsaking God. Such were the extraordinary means employed, even at the last, to bring Judah to a sense of their guilt and danger; and if these means failed to recover them,—if, in spite of all this marvellous forbearance, and compassion, and willingness to forgive, they still continued to go on frowardly in the way of their own heart,—then what remained but that God should execute the judgment which he had solemnly pronounced, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

But the reformation which Josiah was honoured to bring about was not less interesting as a manifestation of God's love and faithfulness towards the Church,—the faithful remnant in Judah. As in all former revivals, the re-establishment of the temple service, in something like its original purity, must have been very refreshing to the people of God. It exhibited to them once more at least the plainest and most intelligible way of access to the divine presence which had ever been vouchsafed to the Church,—even the high priest carrying the blood of atonement into the most holy place, and returning to bless them, and to tell them that their sacrifice had been accepted. The passover, too, must have been a special source of comfort to them, not only as ministering to their own individual edification, but as indicating a national revival of the true religion; for it

was observed under Josiah according to the original institution, as recorded in the book of the law which he had found, and in such a manner as had not been observed since the days of the Judges in Israel. True believers in Judah would be ready to indulge the fond hope, when they witnessed the enthusiasm with which the passover was observed, that there was to be a real national revival of the true religion, and a general return to God. At the same time, when they looked back on what had taken place in their own recollection, they must have had their fears and misgivings lest the revival which they then witnessed might prove like others which preceded it, and might be the last dressing of the barren vineyard before its fences were broken down, and the wild beasts of the forest were admitted to lay it waste.

And so, indeed, it was to be. But though it might and did prove to be the last great national reformation, previous to Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed, and Judah carried into captivity to Babylon, it was not on that account a less affecting proof of God's love and faithfulness to his Church. The restoration of the temple service under Josiah, as in all former revivals, was a new assurance to believers, that the blessings set forth in that service were secured to them, whatever might become of the temple itself. And such an assurance was of unspeakable importance to them for keeping alive their faith and hope. It was in the tabernacle constructed by Moses, and afterwards in the temple as finished by Solomon, that Christ and the blessings of his salvation were most fully and impressively set forth; and we can easily conceive that devout and believing worshippers might come to regard the temple and its ordinances as essential to their enjoyment of the blessings which were so vividly typified there. It must have been to them, therefore, a very painful and perplexing sight to see, as they did from time to time, fearful inroads made, by ungodly kings and apostate priests, on the purity and integrity of the temple and its ordinances. Not only must their feelings have been outraged in witnessing the profanation of all that they held sacred, but they must have felt as if the way of their acceptable approach to God was about to be shut up. And in such a state, their views of the great atoning Sacrifice must have been clouded, and their spiritual comfort must in the same degree have been disturbed.

The temple was thus gradually ceasing, in consequence of repeated violations of its sacredness, to serve the great purpose which it was designed to serve,—that of exhibiting the plainest and most perfect type of Christ, and of all the blessings of his salvation. Solemn threatenings, too, were from time to time addressed to Judah of the near approach of the time when the house of God should be utterly desolated and laid in ruins, and should, therefore, altogether cease to fulfil any of the purposes for which it had been so precious to the Church. The people of God did thus stand greatly in need of some other divinely-appointed method of presenting Christ to their faith and hope, in the room of that by which he had long been typically, but most clearly and fully set before them. And God was graciously making provision for this purpose, by raising up prophets, who were commissioned especially to testify of Christ,—of his person, and character, and work,—and who were to commit their predictions to writing, that so the Church might be in possession of a sure word of prophecy, whereby to sustain their faith and hope in Him to whom the people of God had from the beginning looked forward with earnest and longing expectation. But as if to afford time to the Church to become familiar with some at least of these prophecies, before the temple ceased altogether to set forth Christ, and the way of access to God by him, he was graciously pleased to send, from time to time, a season of revival and refreshing, when, notwithstanding the growing degeneracy of Judah as a nation, the Church enjoyed again for a while the ordinances of the temple service. Of these seasons of revival, that under Josiah was the most remarkable, and it was the last. But before the influence of it passed away, the Church must have been familiar with the predictions of some of the prophets, and among these Isaiah, of whom it may especially be said, that he “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

Such was the divine forbearance and long-suffering patience towards Judah as a nation, and such the divine love and faithfulness towards the Church, manifested in the reformation brought about by Josiah. With regard to the nation at large, that reformation, as in former cases, proved to have been either a hollow profession, or a temporary turning from idols to the outward

worship of the true God, dictated by certain fears and misgivings which the remarkable events of Josiah's reign had awakened, or by the hope of reaping the temporal advantages which never failed to accompany such reformatations. But whatever was their motive, it arose not out of a real conversion to God ; and, therefore, it soon ceased to operate. The divine forbearance, as will always be the case with ungodly men, served but to encourage them in their downward course. The delay in the execution of God's threatened judgments, which was designed to lead them to repentance, had only the effect, through their perverseness, of fostering the miserable delusion that God had departed from his own solemn declarations, and that these judgments never would be executed. Because sentence against their evil works was not executed speedily, therefore their hearts were fully set in them to do evil.

Notwithstanding, therefore, of the revivals which did from time to time take place, and the promising appearances which accompanied these revivals, especially that in Josiah's reign, the nation of Judah was moving onward to the point at which the divine rectitude required that the severest of all the threatened judgments should be inflicted,—the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the captivity of the people. The tide of iniquity in Jerusalem and Judah might at times appear on the surface to be arrested; but below, the current ran steadily, and with increasing velocity. And so it was plainly intimated to Josiah himself: for when he sent to Huldah the prophetess to inquire of the Lord for him and for his people, after hearing the words of the law, the prophetess replied, saying, "Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read; because they have forsaken me. . . . But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, say, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, . . . therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace ; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place."

The utmost, then, that was promised to Josiah, highly favoured as he was, did not go farther than merely that he was not to witness the evil that was coming on Jerusalem and Judah. No hint was given that the threatened evil might be averted. Nay, the very promise to Josiah himself, that he was to be spared the anguish of seeing it, did most emphatically intimate that the judgment was inevitable. And so, in like manner, after Josiah's death, and immediately following an account of the remarkable reformation which he was honoured to effect, it is said, "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." And accordingly we find, that, within little more than twenty years after the death of Josiah,—twenty years of growing degeneracy, and accumulating dishonour and suffering to Judah, —Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon took the city, and burned the house of God, and carried the people into captivity.

Of course, the Church, the true people of God, the faithful remnant in Judah, had their share in all these calamities; and I doubt not they would be ready enough to acknowledge that they deserved more than all that they suffered; for we may safely suppose that they were not so much alive as they ought to have been to the coming judgments of God. They, too, might be ready to conclude, that the reformation under Josiah was to turn away these judgments. Even in their extremity, indeed, they were not left without consolation and hope. They must by that time have been familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah, telling them of that Saviour whom they had been wont to see typified in the temple service; and, moreover, they could not be ignorant of the predictions of Jeremiah, who had prophesied among them up to the last hour, and who expressly foretold, that, at the end of seventy years, the Lord would visit his people in the land of Babylon, and turn again their captivity, and bring them back, and plant them in the land sworn unto their fathers. Still, with all this consolation and encouragement, they could hardly look back on the latter years of their residence in Jerusalem and Judah without recollecting much for which to blame themselves, in being backward to testify, as they ought to have done, for God and his truth, and in being slow to believe the threatenings

of judgment which were addressed to them by the prophets whom God sent, rising up early and sending them.

And may not God's people in our own day be chargeable with the same indifference to God's glory, and the same insensibility to God's threatened judgments? When told of the sinfulness of the times, and when they are warned that the judgments of God may be expected on such sinfulness, are they in no danger of being somewhat influenced by the infidel answer which the world is wont to make to such statements,—Oh, every age is ready to complain that men are worse than they were in any former age; and as for judgments, not only do all things continue as they were, but at no period has the country been more promising, in some respects at least, than it is at present! I fear that sentiments like these are so prevalent in society at large, that they do influence even God's people, though they may hardly be conscious of it. And if so, then how will they feel,—and I may, perhaps, ask, how will they act?—if times of trial and tribulation should peradventure come? Even if the coming of dark and troublous times should be, humanly speaking, a mere peradventure, ought it not to quicken them to make sure of their own personal interest in the Saviour? For without this, they will be more ready, in a season of trial, to cast about for a way of escape from it, to the great damage, if not to the ruin of their souls, than to inquire how they may take unto them “the whole armour of God,” that they may be “able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.”

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